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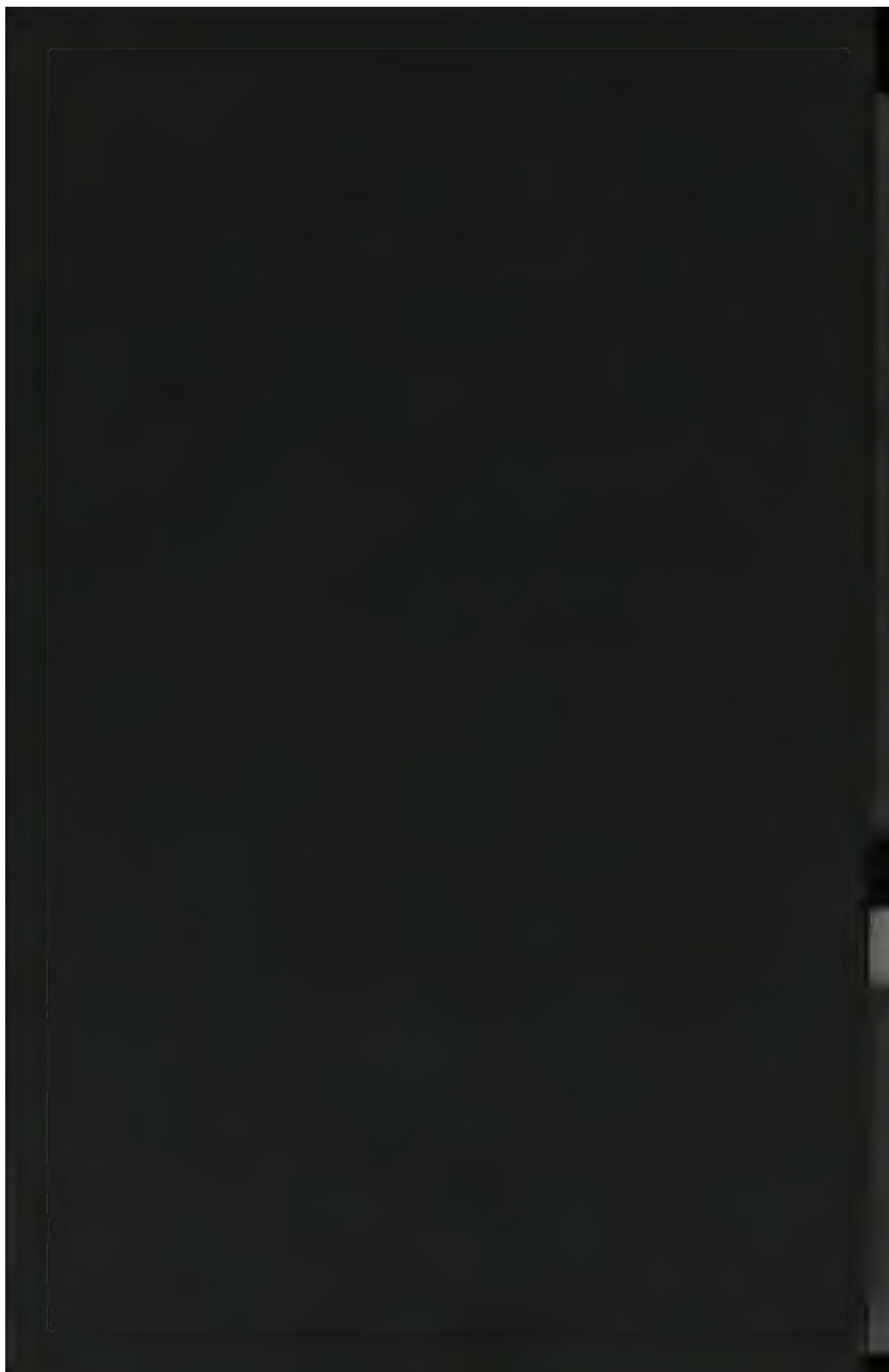
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JACK RAYMOND

BY

E. L. VOYNICH

AUTHOR OF

"THE GADFLY"

"Judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard"

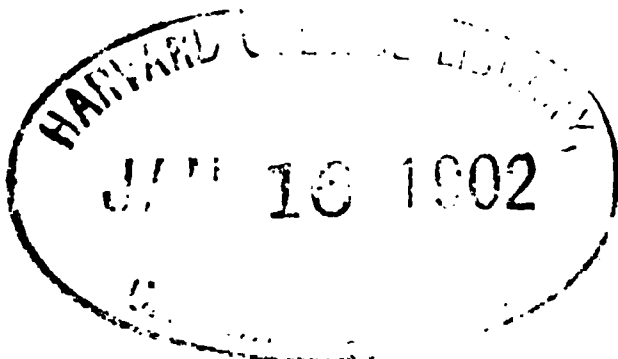


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JACK RAYMOND.

CHAPTER I.

“So this is what you call a good road hereabouts, is it?” said Dr. Jenkins.

He had stopped half-way up the hill, to look about him, and to let Timothy, the fisherman who had met him at the station, put down the heavy bag and rest a bit before climbing any further. Behind them the steep road wound in and out between rough granite blocks and tussocks of dwarf gorse. Before them it rose up sharply, a stony track bordered by wet and withered heather tufts; and turned, passing out of sight round the shoulder of a lichened rock. For the rest, a waste of barren moorland; an angry sun going down, red in a fiery glow; a fierce north wind that rushed by, shrieking curses; and below the cliffs a sullen, moaning, desperate sea; that was all. On

summer days the moor might wear a brighter face among the gold and purple glories of its flowering time; even this ashen sea had doubtless green or blue delights to show on sunny mornings after rain; but this was the doctor's first glimpse of Cornwall, and in the December evening every thing seemed to him chill and bleak and desolate.

The sun dipped, leaving a long red trail across the water, a bloody finger-mark that the waves made haste to wash out. Timothy picked up the bag again.

"It's not so far now, sir; we shall be in before dark. Eh, why surely that be Maaster Richards from Gurnard's Head, and the old woman with him. Good evening, maaster!"

A pony-cart laden with apples jogged round the projecting shoulder of the granite rock. Farmer and pony walked side by side; but for the difference in the number of legs they might have been twin brothers, so much alike they were in expression, in roundness of comfortable figure, in solid evenness of tread. In the cart, among the apples, sat an old woman, half asleep.

“ This is the new doctor for Porthcarrick,” said Timothy. “ We shall have two doctors now, for old Dr. Williams is stopping on, though he’s past much work. Are you rested now, sir ? ”

They climbed a little further, while Farmer Richards and his pony jogged slowly down the hill.

“ Hullo ! ” said the doctor, looking round. “ Something’s wrong with the old fellow’s cart. Look, he’s making signs to us. What is it ? ”

The farmer was gesticulating frantically with his whip, and trying to shout louder than the angry wind.

“ Police ! ” he yelled in a despairing voice. “ Murder ! Help ! Police ! ” .

“ ‘ In all time of our tribulation ’ ! ” gasped the old woman, folding her hands. “ It’s the gang.”

A big, muscular, black-haired boy, with a skin tanned almost to coffee-colour, and a face which struck the doctor as repulsively ugly, came tearing over the brow of the hill. A score of minor demons followed at his heels,

brandishing sticks and yelling ferociously. The gang descended with such suddenness, that before the farmer could defend himself the pony was unhooked from the shafts and the old woman stood wailing by the roadside, wringing her hands at the sight of the overturned cart and the apples rolling in the mud. As Timothy and the doctor came running back, the farmer recovered heart of grace and laid about him with his whip. After a sharp skirmish the gang broke and fled in all directions down the hill, yelling and screeching, with bulging pockets crammed with apples. Pursuit seemed to be hopeless ; but in the act of escaping, one of the boys, a freckled, lanky hobbledohoy, caught his foot against a stone and fell sprawling. The farmer pounced upon him instantly.

“ Jack ! ” shrieked the captive. “ Jack ! ”

The leader bounded to the spot, tripped up the top-heavy farmer with a dexterous twist of one foot, dragged the fallen boy up by the collar, and despatched him at a headlong pace downhill by a thump between the shoulders. Then he glanced round to see if any one else

were in need of help. It was evidently an established convention that he should be the first to charge and the last to flee. As he turned to follow the gang a hand dropped on his shoulder.

"I've caught one, at any rate," said Dr. Jenkins. "No, don't hit him," he added, intercepting the farmer's fist. "And all that bad language won't get your cart up, my man; Timothy, help him with the cart, and leave the boy to me."

The farmer, still swearing, went to join Timothy, who was trying to lift the cart; the old woman meanwhile collecting the scattered apples.

"Well, you're a promising young devil," said Dr. Jenkins to his prisoner, who was wriggling in his grasp like a conger eel.

"What's your name?"

"What's yours?"

"Lord bless you, sir," said Timothy, "that's Jack Raymond. He be nephew to our vicar."

"And own son to Beelzebub," the farmer muttered from between the wheels.

The swarthy imp grinned at the compliment, showing his white teeth.

“Nephew . . . to the Vicar!” Dr. Jenkins repeated incredulously. “Here, stand up, boy; don’t wriggle about so. I won’t hurt you.”

Jack’s eyes opened wide in scornful amazement, and the doctor saw how dusky and yet how luminous they were.

“I should just about think you wouldn’t!”

He left off kicking, however, and stood up straight. His ugliness was of an unfamiliar, barbaric type; but there was nothing degenerate about it, notwithstanding the heavy jaw; his head, indeed, was finely shaped, and the deep-set eyes would have been really magnificent, but for their sullen, morose expression. The singular breadth between them, and the black line of the brows meeting above, gave to the face a look of strength and concentration more appropriate to a bison than to a child.

“So you’re the captain of the Bad Boys’ Gang, are you?” said the doctor. “And what’s your special line, if one may ask?”

Stealing poor men's goods and frightening old women out of their senses, eh?"

"Yes," said Jack, looking straight at him: "and stinging when we get a chance, like that hornet on your beard."

Dr. Jenkins, forgetting the season, instinctively put his hand up to his face. Immediately he received a violent blow, delivered with admirable precision; and by the time he realised that a trick had been played on him, Jack was racing downhill at breakneck speed.

The doctor leaned against a rock and laughed till the tears ran out of his eyes. It was impossible to feel angry, the thing had been so neatly done.

"What a little devil!" he gasped, as soon as he could speak. "Oh, what an outlandish little devil!"

"And that boy," said Timothy, as they walked on again after the cart had been righted, "has been brought up in a godly house and has had the advantages of Christian precept and example ever since he was six years old. But 'tis no use; what's bred in the bone will come out in the flesh."

“It strikes me,” the doctor remarked, “that a good thrashing would have more effect on that urchin than Christian precept and example. He wants the nonsense taken out of him.”

“Why, sir,” said Timothy; “there’s not a boy in Porthcarrick that gets the cane as often as Jack Raymond; anyway, since the captain died.”

“Who?”

“Captain John, the Vicar’s youngest brother. He was drowned three years ago last October, saving life in rough weather off Longships way by Land’s End. The Vicar has no children of his own, so he took in the orphans, for they were left ill-provided, and he’s done his duty by them, as a Christian man.”

“There are more children, then?”

“There’s one little girl, sir—eight years old; and a sweet little maid she is, no more like this imp of darkness than a plaice is like a pilchard. She takes after the Raymonds.”

“And the Vicar is strict with the boy?”

Timothy screwed up his lips.

“Well, sir, there be some gentlemen on the

school board do say he's a bit too strict; 'the flogging parson,' they call him, because he's all for more caning in the schools. But to my mind he's right, sir; the human heart is corrupt and desperately wicked, and how else be 'ee goin' to instil the fear of God into a boy?"

"It doesn't seem to have got instilled into this one."

"Ah, that's the bad blood in him. Many a tear he's cost poor Mrs. Raymond. You must know, she comes of a very respectable family, up St. Ives way; good church people, all of them, and not used to such goings on. She's a godly, pious woman, and good to the poor, as a clergyman's wife should be, and she's cared for those two children as if they'd been her own, though they're none of her kin. Little Molly's the apple of her eye. She's tried her hardest to coax the devil out of the boy, and the Vicar, he's tried to thrash it out, and you might as well plant potatoes on the Runnel Stone. He's his mother's own brat."

"Who was she?"

“A scarlet woman, sir; a play actress from London that Captain John brought home when he was young and wild, to carry shame into a decent house. Lord knows what she'd been before he married her. If you'll believe it, sir, she'd smoke tobacco like a man, and her foot was never inside a place of worship. And then her flaunting skirts and her lewd ways—it was enough to make the old folks turn in their graves! She'd trapes about under the cliffs in dirty weather singing to herself, with her hair streaming down her back, for all the world like a madwoman. Why, I've seen her myself sitting half-dressed with her bare feet in a rock-pool and a crazy artist fellow from London painting her portrait—great maazed antic! She was as ugly as sin, too; you can tell by the boy; but Captain John was fair mad about her. However, she went the way of damnation after the little maid was born; ‘took an engagement,’ she called it, and ran off to Paris to her play-acting; as 'tis written in the Scriptures: ‘the dog returneth to his vomit, and the sow to her wallowing in the mire.’

And there she took the cholera, and died like an unrepentant heathen, so I've heard tell. 'Tis plain it was a judgment. And the captain, poor silly fool, instead of being duly grateful to Providence for a good riddance of bad rubbish, he took on as if his heart was broken in him, and never held up his head again——”

“Is this Porthcarrick?” the doctor interrupted as a sharp turn of the road brought them to a break in the hills and a fishing village nestling between two great cliffs.

“Yes, sir, and that's the lighthouse beyond Deadman's cliff. The white house there is Mr. Hewitt's school; a lot of gentlefolk send their sons there—the Vicar's trustee for it; and that big one higher up is Heath Brow, where the Squire lives.”

“And the old house by the church, all over ivy?”

“That's the Vicarage.”

.

The next morning, when Dr. Jenkins returned from his first stroll through the village, he found on his table a card bearing the in-

scription : "Rev. Jos. Raymond, The Vicarage, Porthcarrick, Cornwall."

"The Vicar said he'd call again," said the landlady. "He seemed in a great taking ; I suppose it's that devil's limb Jack again ; they do say he scared poor old Mrs. Richards fair to death on the cliff road yesterday ; smashed the cart and lamed the pony and——"

"Come, come," said the doctor, "it's not quite so bad as that. I was there myself. Has the farmer been complaining ?"

"Yes, sir ; they say the Vicar had a long bill to pay him this morning ; he threatened to bring an action for assault and battery."

"Oh, that's absurd. I'll go round to the Vicar after dinner and tell him the truth of the story myself."

As he entered the Vicarage garden a sound of light feet running came from behind the fuchsia hedge. Before he had time to draw back, a small creature in a holland pinafore dashed round the corner and came in a head-long rush against his legs, then started away, tossing back a tawny mane.

"Oh, I'm so sorry ! Did I hurt you, sir ?"

The doctor looked down in surprise, wondering if this pretty child could really be Jack Raymond's sister.

"Hurt me? What, by treading on my toes? I was afraid it was I that had hurt you. Are you Mr. Raymond's little niece?"

"I'm Molly. Did you want to see uncle?"

She led him into the house; he, meanwhile, unsuccessfully trying to draw her into conversation. He was fond of children; and Molly, clean and wholesome throughout, shy yet not awkward, freckled and tanned with sun and wind, appeared to him a creature altogether delightful. Charming as she was, however, she would certainly not grow up beautiful; for, though so unlike her brother in colouring and expression, she possessed, in a modified form, the same obstinate mouth and heavy jaw; but her eyes bore no resemblance to Jack's; they were deliciously limpid and blue.

The Rev. Mr. Raymond was an iron-grey man, serious and cold, with eyes as lifeless as his grizzled hair. He held himself erect like a soldier, though without a soldier's ease. There was about him an antiquated stiffness,

yet withal a certain patient dignity, as of one mindful that he was made in the image of God. His sense of order would not tolerate useless growth of any kind ; therefore he was clean-shaven, showing the nakedness of the worst thing in his face—a Chinese insensitive-ness, at the corners of the mouth. A little more curve and pointing of the lines might have rendered the face a fine one, impressive if not sympathetic ; but as it was, he seemed a diagram of virtue drawn in monochrome.

He sent Molly away, and then began a laborious apology for the wickedness of Jack, the “devil’s limb.” Seeing how much he took the matter to heart, the visitor cut him short good-humouredly, giving his own version of the story, as of a mere schoolboy prank, and turned the conversation to other subjects.

Presently tea was brought in, and together with it came Mrs. Raymond, a stout, submissive, motherly woman, older than her husband, with indefinite eyebrows plaintively raised in an arch of chronic faint surprise. Her black gown was the perfection of neatness, and not a hair of her head was out of place. Molly, in a

clean white pinafore, the thick curls carefully brushed and tied back with a ribbon, made a gracious little picture, clinging shyly to her aunt. An air of peaceful domesticity seemed to enter with the woman and child. The bread, butter, and cake were too good not to be home made; and when, after tea, Mrs. Raymond sat down by the window to finish embroidering a frock for Molly, the visitor saw that she was no less excellent a needle-woman than a cook. She was also charitable, as appeared from the red woollen comforter which Molly was learning to knit; the little girl had evidently been taught that the making of warm garments for the poor is an important duty. It occurred to him that this woman of plastic virtues must sometimes find it a little fatiguing to stand a perpetual buffer between husband and nephew.

“Sarah,” said the Vicar, when the tea had been cleared away, “I have been telling Dr. Jenkins how deeply we regret what happened on the cliff road yesterday. He is so kind as to take the matter very lightly, and not to demand any more formal apology.”

Mrs. Raymond lifted her mild eyes to the visitor's face.

"We are very sorry that you should have had any annoyance. But we have done our best, indeed; and it is most kind of you not to want the boy punished . . ."

"He will be punished in any case," said the Vicar quietly. "The entry is already made in the conduct book."

"Not on my account, I hope," Dr. Jenkins put in. "I regarded the whole thing really as a joke, and should never have thought of complaining if you had not happened to hear of it."

"You are very kind," replied the Vicar; "but I never overlook an offence."

"Good Heavens, what a piled-up account there must be against that boy!" thought the doctor. He turned the conversation away, as soon as he could, from the sore subject of Jack's delinquencies. On other topics the Vicar proved a very agreeable talker; practical, clear-headed, and fairly well informed. He took a great interest in local philanthropic and pious enterprises, particularly in missions.

He was giving the visitor an account of his connection with the Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen, when the house-door was violently slammed and Mrs. Raymond looked up in nervous anticipation.

“Jack !” called the Vicar, rising and opening the door of the room. “Come in here. Molly, my dear,” he added, turning to the little girl ; “you had better run upstairs and play.”

“Mind you change your pinafore,” said Mrs. Raymond, as the child went out. “And ask Mary Anne—— Oh, Jack, where have you been to get into that state !”

Jack had slouched into the room with his hands in his pockets. He took in the situation at a glance, and stopped short beside the door, scowling at the visitor. Sullen, grimy, and unkempt, his obstinate chin stuck out, his jacket torn and dirty, and the wet mud from his boots soiling the clean carpet, he looked as ill-favoured and ill-conditioned a young brute as any family could be cursed with.

“Do you remember this gentleman ?” asked the Vicar, with ominous composure.

"I'll bet he remembers me, anyway," said Jack. Heard in a room, his voice sounded curiously full and resonant for his age.

"I certainly do," said the visitor, still cheerfully trying to avert the gathering storm. "Come here and shake hands, boy, to show there's no ill feeling."

Jack looked at him silently from under lowered brows.

"Go up and shake hands," said the Vicar, still gently, but with angry eyes. "Your aunt and I have apologised for you, as you have not done it for yourself."

Jack approached the visitor in his slouching way, and held out a grimy left hand, keeping the right still in his pocket.

"Why not the other hand?" asked the doctor.

"Can't."

"What have you done to yourself now?" asked Mrs. Raymond, with a pathetic, unconscious emphasis on the last word. "Why, your sleeve's all over mud, and you've torn that new jacket!"

"Take your hand out of your pocket,"

said the Vicar. His voice was growing sharp with suppressed irritation.

The hand, when unrolled from a dirty, blood-stained handkerchief, proved to be scratched and grazed.

“How did you do that?”

Jack threw a sullen glance at his uncle.

“Climbing on Deadman’s Cliff.”

“Where you have been strictly forbidden to go?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, Jack,” said the aunt helplessly; “how can you be so disobedient!”

The Vicar took out the black book and made another entry.

“Go to your room and wait till I come,” was all he said.

Jack turned with a shrug of his shoulders, and left the room, whistling. Mrs. Raymond followed, glancing nervously at her husband.

“It’s no use our trying to hide the skeleton in our family cupboard away from you,” said the Vicar, turning to his visitor with a sigh. “It has been forced upon your notice, against

our will. My nephew's bad disposition has been a heavy cross to Mrs. Raymond and myself; the heaviest with which it has pleased Providence to afflict us."

"He may grow out of this wilfulness in time," the doctor ventured, consolingly. "After all, many very good men have been naughty boys."

"Naughty, yes; but unhappily it is not mere childish naughtiness that we have to contend with in my nephew; it is an inherently evil disposition."

He looked into the fire for a little while; then added with a gesture of resignation: "If Timothy has not already told you the wretched story you are sure to hear it soon from some of the village gossips. Jack inherits from his mother a character which seems incapable of reform, its vices are so deeply rooted. Neither persuasion nor firmness has any effect upon him; after years of care and earnest efforts to arouse some glimmering of better feelings, he grows steadily worse and worse. We have been greatly blessed in that Molly, as yet at least,

shows no trace of vicious tendencies ; but for the boy I have little hope."

As soon as he could, Dr. Jenkins made his escape from the house. He was wearied of the subject of Jack and his sins. "Hang it all!" he said to himself; "if that confounded cub is to be rammed down my throat wherever I go, I shall have to set up a placard on my door: 'It is requested not to talk about the crimes of the Vicar's nephew.'"

In the garden was a shed used for storing fire-wood. Passing beside it he heard a noise overhead, and looked up. Jack, serene in the consciousness of a position at once dangerous and impregnable, was sitting astride on the corner of the sloping roof, with a huge chunk of bread in one hand and a sour green cooking-apple, probably a remnant of yesterday's loot, in the other. He was devouring the two in alternate bites.

"Hullo!" said the doctor. "How did you get there? I thought you were sent upstairs."

The imp glanced at him laconically and

took another bite out of the apple. The deliberate crunching sound set the doctor's teeth on edge.

"You'll have a stomach ache if you eat unripe fruit at that pace."

"I haven't time to talk," Jack replied, with his mouth full. "I've got to go indoors and be thrashed in a minute, and I want to finish my tea first."

"It doesn't seem to affect your appetite."

Jack shrugged his shoulders and began upon another apple. Mrs. Raymond came running down the path, stout and panting, with clasped hands.

"Jack! Jack! Where are you? Go in at once, you wicked boy! Oh, my dear, do make haste and go in; your uncle will be so angry!"

She caught sight of the visitor standing in the path, and stopped short. Jack looked round, grinning.

"Isn't she soft? She always blubbers when I get a licking."

"You don't, I suppose?"

"I?" said Jack, with a contemptuous

stare. "I'm not an old woman. Is uncle going upstairs now, Aunt Sarah? I'll bet you I'll be there before him."

He jumped down from the roof and took the sill of the bow window with as clean a run and spring as if he had been training for a professional acrobat. From there he swung himself up by the ivy to a projecting ledge running round the house between the two stories, and scrambled in at an upper window like a cat.

Mrs. Raymond turned to the visitor in despair.

"What am I to do with him?" she said.

CHAPTER II.

THE boys came trooping out from school. It was a half-holiday and a glorious midsummer afternoon, and every one, or almost every one, was in high spirits. Jim Greaves, the eldest boy, who was nearly seventeen, and a person of consequence, having always plenty of pocket-money, walked arm in arm with his special friend, Robert Polwheal, "the lamb," so called for his habit of bullying the little ones. The two boys were not popular in the school; but as Jim was richer and Rob stronger than most of the others, a good many things were forgiven them, or, if not forgiven, submitted to in silence. The dullness of life at Porthcarrick had induced them to join Jack Raymond's gang of larrikins, which enrolled boys of various characters, sizes, and social ranks; and, though both were much older than the captain, his dominant will kept them fairly submissive to orders. Yet neither of them had any natural gift for

marauding, and there was small love between them and Jack ; they still remembered, though they pretended to forget, how last year he had fought them, one after the other, for ill-treating a puppy. Though physically somewhat overmatched, he had succeeded, by dint of sheer pugnacity, in giving both of them as much pommelling as they cared to have ; and had then gone cheerfully home with a swollen nose and one eye bunged up, to be, as usual, thrashed by his uncle for fighting.

Since then they had treated him with the respect due to so warlike a captain ; and had indulged their secret ill-will only by making, in his presence, remarks which they knew would have infuriated him had the double meanings but been intelligible to his ignorance. When his back was turned the gang would shriek with laughter at the incongruity of a leader in wickedness too "green" to understand Rob Polwheal's jokes. It was perhaps as much the general enjoyment of a comic situation as the fear of his big fists which saved him from enlightenment.

He, for his part, had nearly forgotten the

incident of the puppy, and certainly bore no ill-will on account of it. Thrashings were matters of common occurrence ; and, for the rest, he was still in the barbaric stage of cubhood, and had fought as much for pure joy in fighting as for any sentimental reason. Nevertheless, he instinctively disliked both Greaves and Polwheal, just as he disliked Charlie Thompson, the fat, short-winded boy whose hands always disgusted him—he could not have told why. Jack, like many primitive creatures, had a curious physical shrinking from anything not quite healthy. Singularly enough, this subtle instinct of repulsion had never yet warned him against the Vicar ; there his feeling was quite simple and elementary ; he hated his uncle, just as he liked animals, just as he despised Aunt Sarah.

Mr. Hewitt, the schoolmaster, walked down the lane with his eyes on the ground ; he did not share the general high spirits. The responsibilities of his profession weighed heavily upon him, for he was a conscientious person, and nature had not intended him for a schoolmaster.

“Together again,” he muttered, looking after the two big boys as they walked off arm in arm.

“They’re always huggermuggering over something,” said the curate, coming up behind him. Mr. Hewitt turned round quickly, with a look of relief; he and the curate were old friends.

“I’m awfully worried about this business, Black,” he said. “Do you think the Vicar suspects anything?”

“I’m certain he doesn’t; he’d have turned the place inside out. You know how severe he is about anything immoral. Why, the other day, with Roscoe’s girl—I thought he would have frightened her into a fit. It’s all very well, Hewitt, but he goes too far. The girl’s very young and ignorant, and it was not fair to press her so.”

“I don’t agree with you. As vicar of the parish he ought to know the seducer’s name, for the protection of other girls. It was sheer obstinacy that made her refuse to tell.”

“Or sheer terror. Anyhow, about the boys——”

The schoolmaster drew back.

"For Heaven's sake!" he cried; "you don't suspect one of my boys about the Roscoe girl?"

"No, no, of course not! It's some young fisherman. That is . . . " They both paused a moment.

"I hadn't thought of that," the curate went on, with a troubled face; "but Greaves and Polwheal Anyway, it's no use imagining horrors like that till we have cause. And Heaven knows the other thing's black enough."

"It is indeed; and the worst is that I'm afraid the Vicar's own nephew is at the bottom of it all."

"Hewitt, are you sure of that? Jack is without exception the most troublesome boy I ever came across, but he doesn't look to me that sort, somehow. Now if you'd said Thompson——"

"Oh, as for Thompson, I have no doubt at all. But I'm afraid Jack must be a bad lot too; he's so utterly callous. And if so, his influence over all the other boys makes him fearfully dangerous. You know, in every

thing, it's he that leads them away. I scarcely know how to go and tell Mr. Raymond what I suspect, after all the trouble he's taken about the school. I'm convinced of one thing: if we have a scandal in this place, and boys expelled, and the newspapers reporters down, and his nephew's in it,—it'll break the Vicar's heart. Who's that—Greggs?"

A slim, indefinite-looking boy, with timid eyes, too prominent and a little too near together, got up from behind a tussock of gorse, and pulled at his cap with a shamefaced grin. He was the village blacksmith's son, and a personal satellite of Jack Raymond, without whose nefarious influence he would probably never have had the courage to rob any man's orchard. A born huckster, he made a good deal of pocket-money by accompanying Mr. Hewitt's scholars on various marauding expeditions under Jack's leadership, and selling them birds, ferrets, and fishing-tackle by the way.

"Could you go a message for me this afternoon?" asked the curate.

"If Master Jack will let me, sir; he told

me to wait for him here: he wants to go fishing."

"You see," sighed Mr. Hewitt, as he walked on with his friend. "Jack told him to wait; and he'll wait the whole afternoon sooner than disobey. A boy like that is putty in Jack's hands."

Indeed, Billy Greggs had waited for a long time when his commander appeared, moody and wrathful-eyed, and dismissed him with a curt: "Bill, it's no go."

"Why, Jack, aren't you coming?"

"Can't; the beastly sneak is keeping me in to do a lot of piggish Latin—just because the weather's fine."

"What, old Hewitt? Why——"

"No, uncle, of course; it's just his spite."

"Have you been putting his back up again?"

"Oh, the everlasting story—want of respect to the Bishop. I wish that old boy would come back out of his grave for five minutes—wouldn't I just punch his head!"

The Bishop, an eminent and learned great-uncle of the Raymonds, and the only member

of the family who had ever attained to any special distinction, was at the vicarage a kind of household god on a small scale. Every object connected with his memory was treated with solemn reverence; and Jack's grudge against him was, perhaps, a natural result of the many hundreds of "lines" that he had written out, on various half-holidays, as penance for transgressing against the family taboo.

"You know that knife with the green handle that uncle makes such a fuss over because the Duke of something or other gave it to the Bishop? I just took it to mend my tackle this afternoon, and, of course, he came in and caught me; and wasn't he wild! I slipped out at the back door to let you know. I'll get done as quick as I can. Good-bye."

"Jack!" Billy called after the retreating figure; "meet me behind our cowshed when you're done; we'll have larks."

Jack stopped and turned back. "Why, what's up?"

"Whitefoot's calving, and something's gone

wrong. Father's sent for the vet to put her right. He won't let me in; but there's a chink at the back by the ash-heap, and we can——"

Jack flared up suddenly.

"Bill Greggs, if I catch you hanging about and peeping at things that aren't your business, the vet 'll have you to put right next, you dirty little cad."

Billy subsided, meekly enough, but with a small internal chuckle, remembering what things could safely be said and done under this strict commander's very nose.

"All right," he said mildly; "you needn't snap my head off. I say, do you want a grey-bird?"

"What, a tame one?"

"Well, you can tame it if you like. I caught one yesterday in the glen—a beauty. You can have it for ninepence."

"And where am I going to get the ninepence?"

"Why, you had half-a-crown the other day."

Jack shrugged his shoulders; money never

would stop in his pockets for any length of time.

"I've only got twopence halfpenny now."

"All right! then I shall let Greaves have the bird; he asked me for it. I'll blind it to-night."

Jack's level brows contracted into a frown.

"Let the thing alone, can't you!" he said angrily. "What d'you want to blind it for? It'll sing right enough without that."

At this second display of mawkishness in his captain Billy permitted himself a little snigger.

"Why, Jack, I didn't think you were so soft! Of course I'm going to blind it; it's the proper way. There's nothing to make all that fuss about; you just stick a needle into a cork and make it red-hot and——"

"Let me see the bird before you do it," Jack interrupted imperiously. "I'll get done by tea-time."

He walked away, his forehead still contracted. Perhaps the dash of Hungarian blood inherited from his mother was responsible for the overweening personal pride

which made any suspicion of ridicule so intolerably galling to him. He rated himself fiercely for caring who peeped and sniggered at "beastly" sights, or put out a wild bird's eyes. What was it all to him that he should mind so much? Nobody else ever minded those things.

Nevertheless, the grey-bird and the hot needle kept getting in the way of the Latin verses the whole afternoon, and Jack's temper grew worse and worse. His education and surroundings, the steady hardening process through which he had been put, had come near to grinding out of him whatever natural softness he might originally have possessed; and, being inordinately proud of his reputation as the most callous reprobate of the district, he was afflicted with a kind of shame every time any thing touched upon one of those little sensitive spots, of whose existence no one knew but himself. By the time the Latin was finished he was boiling over with impatience to commit some reckless enormity which should at once "pay uncle out" for the spoiled half-holiday and restore

himself to his proper place in his own estimation and in that of Billy Greggs. He wiped his inky fingers on his aunt's clean table-cover, thrust them into his black thatch of hair, and racked his brains for a plan.

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In the next room the Vicar was at work upon his sermon for Sunday morning. He wrote more fluently than was usual with him, and the blunt corners of his mouth were compressed into their most characteristic line. The sermon was to be a thunderbolt in Porthcarrick, a stern denunciation of Farmer Roscoe's daughter and her unknown seducer. The girl herself and her proud, helpless old father would probably be present, for the Roscoes were regular attendants at church; but Mr. Raymond was not sensitive. He had no sympathy with what he called "her crime"; in his youth he had known something of temptation, but not of such temptation as Maggie Roscoe would have understood.

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"Hi! Bill!"

Billy Greggs was poking up a fat snail with a stick ; he turned round at the shout and saw Jack Raymond racing down the heather slope towards him.

“ Done your Latin ? ”

Jack threw himself full length on the heather.

“ Yes, at last.”

Billy returned to the snail. For some little time Jack lay royally at ease, kicking his heels in the air like the uncouth young Philistine he was : then he sat up, pulled a knife out of his pocket, opened it with a broken and dirty finger nail and began whittling a stick to a cheerful accompaniment of “ Tommy, make room for your un-*cle* . . . ”

“ Hullo ! ” Billy said, after watching him a moment. “ Where did that knife come from ? ”

“ What’s that to you ? ”

“ Hold hard ; let’s have a look.”

Jack held out the knife in a great brown fist. It was an expensive-looking tool, with a malachite handle and initials engraved on a gold plate.

“ Why, it’s . . . the Bishop’s ! Jack ! ”

Jack returned the knife to his pocket with a grin.

"How did you get hold of it?"

"P'raps uncle gave it me for being such a good boy."

"Rats!"

"P'raps I took it."

Billy whistled softly. "My eye, won't you just catch it!"

"Rather!" said Jack laconically, kicking the heather roots. Then, after a pause: "I say, Bill!"

"Well?"

"Will you swop?"

"Swop what?"

"Why, that bird—for the knife."

Billy sat bolt upright and stared, open-mouthed. The "grey-bird," a common mavis thrush, might be worth, at the most, a shilling; the knife would be worth, to the boy found guilty of stealing it . . .

"Why, Jack, he'll lick you into the middle of next week!"

Jack shrugged his shoulders. "I'm not a girl, to mind a bit of a hiding, am I?"

"I say!" Billy turned over on his elbows and looked at him with interest. "You get thrashed a lot, don't you? They do say your uncle's a reg'lar old beast for caning."

"'Twon't be caning any more, so he says. He told me, the last licking I had, he'd take the horsewhip next time, and see if that 'd do me any good."

"What had you been doing?"

Jack was more and more laconic. "'Forget. Time before last it was for stealing pears out of the garret and shying them off the roof at the squire's old maid sister when she came to call. Just smashed her nice new bonnet."

"The pears did?"

"Only the bad ones; I ate the others, half before the licking and half after, to take the taste out of my mouth."

"You're a cool hand!"

"You don't suppose I care," said Jack, with lofty scorn.

Billy reflected. A boy who could stand unlimited "licking" without turning a hair was a creature to be approached with due

respect, however ludicrous might be his preposterous innocence and his occasional fits of "softness."

"Do you really want to swop?"

"'Course I do. Where's the bird?"

"At home. But—look here——"

"Well?"

"Are you sure you won't . . ."

"Won't what?"

"Why, get me into hot water?"

Jack's big fist took him by the scruff of the neck and jerked him back on the heather.

"Now, then, none of your cheek!"

"No, I mean . . . if your uncle——"

"Bill Greggs, if I swop, I swop. You take the knife, and I take the grey-bird and the hiding. Is that plain? Then stow your rot and clear out of there and fetch the bird."

"Oh, well, if you don't care, I don't."

He ran back to the blacksmith's cottage. Jack lay still, kicking his heels lazily, and meditating on his bargain. He was not really quite so indifferent to consequences as he chose to appear. Now that there was no one to see, his forehead contracted again; at

the bottom of his heart he was afraid. But his reputation as a "devil's limb" had to be kept up; and moreover, thrashings, as he reflected, are among the inevitable accidents of life, like "the act of God" that the railway companies mention in their consignment bills. You can't expect to get through boyhood without them; not, at least, if you happen to be an orphan of evil disposition, with a double dose of original sin and a pernicious resemblance to a mother who is both dead and damned; so it makes little difference just when they come. And then, to have one's eyes burnt out and be set to sing for all one's life in a little wooden cage. . . And after all, it would be a joke to see uncle downright furious. The theft of the Bishop's knife would probably go down in the "conduct book" with a black cross against it; uncle's memory was evidently short. Jack, for his part, needed no such artificial aids; he had many grievances against his uncle, and he remembered them every one.

Whatever else the Vicar had accomplished, he had at least taught this turbulent, difficult

nature some self-control. In the Captain's life-time Jack had been a creature of impulses; had bitten and scratched when he was angry and struggled furiously when he was hurt. Now he was chronically angry and well accustomed to being hurt; and had learned to set his teeth and wait for his opportunity. It generally came, sooner or later; and he did not often fail to render the offending "grown-ups" as uncomfortable as they had made him.

Billy ran back with the wretched mavis panting and fluttering in a cage of firewood hardly bigger than itself. So Jack walked home with the cage under his arm, and, slipping into the house unobserved, hid the bird in his bedroom.

After supper he said good-night, and carried his books upstairs, telling the Vicar that he had lessons to prepare for Monday's school. His room was small and low, but he liked it better than any other in the house, because it had windows facing east and west, so that he could see the sun both rise and set. When he had locked his door he took the

cage from its hiding-place and set it on the western window-sill.

"All right, you little fool!" he grumbled to the terrified bird as it shrank up against the bars. "Keep your hair on! It's me he'll pitch into, not you."

He put into the cage a bit of watercress which he had slipped inside his jacket at tea-time. But the mavis would only flutter desperately and beat its wings against the bars. Jack sat down on the sill beside it, turning his back to the sunset, and considered what to do next.

His first idea had been to keep the bird and tame it. Certainly a thrush would be a second-rate kind of pet; he would have much preferred, for instance, a starling, which could be taught to swear, and to blaspheme against bishops and against green-handled knives and missions to deep sea fishermen. But a thrush would be better than nothing; and if he was going to get into trouble for its sake, it was only fair that he should have some fun out of the transaction. On the other hand, wild creatures do not always take kindly to captivity; and for that matter, uncle would be

angry enough to kill the bird for sheer spite if ever he should happen to find out. Had he not drowned Molly's pet kitten last winter, to punish her for getting her frock dirty? Jack's eyes darkened at the memory; he hated the Vicar with the silent, poisonous hatred that remembers and bides its time; and in his long and heavy score against his enemy this was a big item. Until lately his attitude towards Molly had been one of Olympian indifference; what had he to do with a mere girl, who was afraid of the dark and couldn't so much as throw a stone straight? But the day when he had come home from school and found her in the tool-house, blind and sick with crying because Tiddles was dead,—("and oh, Tiddles did squeak so!")—had been the beginning of a new sense in him, that it was somehow his business to protect his sister.

No, there was nothing for it but to let the bird go. The fate of Tiddles was a warning; it does not do to get fond of creatures that you are not strong enough to defend. Once free in Trevanna glen, the mavis must fight

its own battles. "If you get caught again, you little duffer," he remarked, rising and opening the window; "I shan't help you out; once is enough."

Trevanna glen lay soft and dim in a golden sunset haze. The sky was too clear for flaming colour; only a few high cloudlets trailed their faint rose bands across the west. From the beach came a low sound of ripples on the shingle; then the wailing cry of a sea-gull.

As Jack opened the cage door the mavis fluttered, panic-stricken, and shrank away. He drew back a little, and the bird passed by him like a lightning flash. He heard a sudden cry, a whirring of swift wings; and leaned upon the sill, following with his eyes a moving black spot, small and smaller, that darted straight towards the glen.

He crossed the room and sat down on his bed, holding on to the foot-rail. He seemed to have gone all shaky inside, and there was a tightening in his throat. When he shut his eyes the tree-tops came back, and the yellow haze, and the spread wings of a living soul that had been caged and now was free.

He opened his eyes at last and looked around him, solemnly afraid. The room startled him with its familiar aspect; it was all as it had been, and he alone was changed. On the table lay his lesson books; the empty cage stood on the window-sill, the watercress dangling from its bars. He must smash up the cage, by the way, or uncle would ask . . .

Ah, what did uncle matter now?

He went back to the window and looked out, his shoulder on the lintel, his head against his arm. There he watched while the sunset faded. All the broad spaces between earth and sky were full of violet shadows; in the glen the tree-tops swayed a little, and grew still; the sea-birds called, and called again, and settled in the hollows, and all things fell asleep.

Then stars came out; one, and another, and a thousand, shining above shadowy trees and ghostly moorland half asleep, with clear eyes, full of wonder; as if they too had only now begun to understand, and, looking down upon the world's familiar face, had seen that it was good.

CHAPTER III.

As far back as Jack's earliest memory went, he had always liked animals and plants and rough grey rocks and yellow foam.

They had, indeed, been all there was like. Human beings, especially grown-up ones, had hitherto played in his conception of life a singularly small and contemptible part. They were inevitable, of course, and sometimes useful; but neither interesting nor pleasant, and generally much in the way. Within the last three years a new element had been creeping into his relation with the adults of his world; he had begun to see them natural, as it were, hereditary enemies. Anything brutal or stupid, any pettiness or fidgety interference on their part seemed to him a matter of course, coming from creatures by nature illogical, spiteful and incompetent; and, his standpoint having once become fixed, many wise and necessary

restrictions were lumped together with the others in careless contempt. He never troubled himself about the reasons of a prohibition; if a thing was forbidden, it was presumably just because there was no sensible ground of objection to it.

Of men and women in any other capacity than that of despised authority he had little knowledge. After the loss of the black-browed mother whom he could dimly remember, he and Molly had spent four years in St. Ives under the care of their grandmother and a crotchety maiden aunt. These two ladies had regarded the children as visitations of Providence, whom, for their sins, they must at regular intervals feed and wash, especially wash; no boy was ever more heroically scrubbed than Jack. But cold water and rough towels, excellent as they were, had not satisfied all the soul's needs of the growing boy; and as quite a small child he had sat up in his bed in the dark to address, to the big anthropomorphic Thing which he had been taught to worship, a bitter reproach: "It's not fair. What did You

make me for, if You weren't going to let anybody want me?"

The sailor father had wanted him, at any rate ; it had been good to know that there was one person in the world who did not think it a disgrace for a boy to be dark and ugly and to have black eyes like his mother's, even though that person was nearly always at sea. But then had come a night of rough weather and distress signals all along the coast ; and the next morning Aunt Sarah had driven over with a white face and a telegram. Since then the orphans had lived at the Vicarage in Porthcarrick.

Uncle Josiah and Aunt Sarah had shown to the passionate boy much earnest care for his body's welfare and his soul's health, but very little personal friendliness or affection and that little, when it came from the man, he resented as impertinence, when from the woman, despised as weakness. People should play fair, and not try to catch you with shams that you didn't expect. Grown-ups had two recognised engines of warfare and should stick to them. One was moralis-

ing, or "jaw"; the other, sheer coercion. This latter, though disagreeable, seemed to him the more logical weapon. It would have saved trouble to begin with the thing, once they were going to end with it. Indeed, the Vicar would have been surprised could he have learned how much more keenly the boy resented his sermons than his punishments. Innumerable thrashings had instilled into Jack a certain respect for a person who can hit hard; and had his relations with his uncle begun and ended with the cane, there would have been on his part far less bitterness; but the moralising filled him with scorn, and the occasional attempts at friendliness with fierce disgust.

Aunt Sarah he simply despised. She, poor woman, had certainly never been guilty of any brutality towards him; it is doubtful whether she had uttered a harsh word to any one in all her ineffectual, well-meaning days. Her ambitions went no further than to see around her smiling faces of contented servants and children, looking up in happy submission to their and her king; and her one

grief, besides that of childlessness, was that the faces, though mostly submissive enough, were not always happy. Jack, in a chronic state of disobedience and revolt, was to her an utterly unsolvable problem. She was always kind to him,—it was not in her to be otherwise to any living thing,—but she looked upon him with a sort of dread, and with a feeling which, in a more definite nature, would have been dislike; he was so inconvenient. Her little careful plans to make things “go smoothly” were always being disturbed and thrown out by this one impossible factor.

If it had crossed her mind that the boy was lonely and miserable she would have been sincerely horrified; merely to read in the parish magazine of an ill-used child was enough to make her cry; and, timid as she was, she had often risked the displeasure of her god on earth by trying to beg Jack off from various punishments. Had he ever tried to beg himself off, she would have liked him better; his hard indifference repelled her. She herself, though a most conscien-

tious woman, had once even stepped a little aside from the exact truth to screen him from the Vicar's anger. She had been found out, of course ; for Jack, when asked about the matter, had told the truth at once. The worst of it was that his habit of acknowledging his misdeeds appeared to be the result of sheer bravado, not of any love for veracity ; for he had no scruples about telling any number of falsehoods when it suited his purpose to do so. But he never prevaricated ; when he told a lie, he did it deliberately, with a straight look between the eyes ; and that, again, Aunt Sarah could not understand. So beyond much gentle moralising, pathetically futile, her vicarious motherhood, in his case, could not go. She lavished all her affection on Molly, whose evil tendencies, if they were there at all, were still hidden in the mists of babyhood ; and left Jack to struggle with a bitter heart as best he might.

He was not envious because his sister was preferred before him. In a certain stiff, shy way of his own he was fond of the child. But they had not much in common. She

was not only little, and a girl,—he might have forgiven these defects,—she was also “good.” She sat on people’s laps, and shut the door after her, and was kissed and praised, and had sweets given her by visitors who liked to stroke her pretty hair. Jack wondered sometimes how the caresses didn’t make her sick, and why she didn’t cut the hair off with Aunt Sarah’s scissors and throw it in the people’s faces. He would have dragged his out by the roots if any one had “pawed it about” that way.

The only human creatures whom he recognised as having any moral claim upon him were the larrikins to whom, for nearly two years now, he had been leader. His ethical code was barbaric and primitive; it never occurred to him to think that he was doing anything mean or unworthy in breaking people’s windows, looting their apples, or wantonly damaging their kitchen gardens, nor did he think it necessary to consult at all the personal wishes of his subjects; he was the master, and his will was law; but to abandon his boys in a crisis, or allow one of

them to take a caning which he could by any manœuvring have transferred to his own shoulders, would have seemed to him a monstrous thing. His tiny kingdom was an absolute despotism ; in his eyes the whole duty of a subject consisted in obedience, that of a ruler in loyalty ; he was splendidly loyal to his boys, but he despised them in his heart.

From human society, great and small, he came back always with relief to furred or feathered creatures, to cliffs and moor and sea. The puppies and the rabbits, the village dogs and cats, all knew a side of him which the Vicar had never seen. Even the lesser humans to whom he extended his protection never saw quite the real Jack ; with Billy Greggs he was scornfully tolerant, with Molly condescendingly good-natured ; with animals, especially if they were small and helpless, he could be full of tender loving-kindness.

But the best that was in him was known only to Spotty. She was the old brown dog in the stable yard ; a sorry specimen truly,

and, except for Jack, without a friend in the world. In her best days she had not been much to look at; a hopeless mongrel, booby-tailed and bandy-legged, with a white patch over one ragged ear. Now in her old age she had gone blind, and was no longer of any use as a watch-dog. It would have been kind to have her chloroformed; she was growing too feeble to take exercise and keep healthy and was becoming a burden to herself and an object of disgust to others. But Mrs. Raymond disliked the idea of killing anything, and the Vicar was too just a man to turn off a faithful servant because she was past her work; so Spotty remained in the yard, well fed and housed, and tolerated as agricultural paupers are tolerated.

On this old, ugly, miserable creature whom death had passed by and forgotten was showered all the hidden gold of Jack's affection. He never forgot to wash and comb her, or to soak her biscuits carefully, and never forgave any one who laughed at her infirmities. Under his indifference and callousness lay a dumb, fierce, hot resentment.

against the injustice of men and things. No one was ever fair to Spotty, because she had grown old and blind; as if that in itself were not unfair enough. No one was ever fair to him, because he was born ugly and wicked; and he could no more help that than Spotty could help being blind. Their common wrong was a bond between them; and it was Spotty alone who knew his secret.

For Jack had one secret; only one, and that so simple and so plainly written in his face that anybody could have read it who had looked at him with unprejudiced eyes. But there were no such eyes at the Vicarage; and his secret remained unread. It was that he was unhappy. He had never acknowledged it to himself, and would have been amazed and indignant had any one suggested it; but it was true, nevertheless. Though in some ways, especially impish ways, he got a fair amount of enjoyment out of life, there was always behind his pleasures a dull aching, as of emptiness that nothing could fill. To be glad when night came because another day was over; to hide every little hurt and

grief away for fear some one should find out; to have his hand against every man every man's hand—often so heavy—against him, seemed to him a matter of course. He thought about it all, he thought that the world was stupidly managed somehow, and that it was no use to worry because one couldn't make things better.

It was this secret hunger of the soul that had driven him to seek his loves outside human companionship. The bleak & Cornish moorland was a tenderer mother to him than Aunt Sarah, with all her kind heart, had ever been. On his worst days when mischief failed to help and even fighting could not cure the aching restlessness within him, he would slip away and wander on the cliffs alone for hours. Then he would lie down in some still, shadowy gorge cleft, and bury himself in the wet fern, and find comfort somehow.

So, blind as he was and groping in dark, he had learned to know and love the healing touch of nature. Then, when

navis flew away, his eyes were opened, and whereas he was blind, now he saw.

For a long time he sat by the window, looking out ; at last he undressed himself in the dark and crept into bed, very grave and subdued. Fortunately there was no one in the world who cared enough about him to look in upon his sleep, as happens sometimes with boys who have mothers ; so his pride was safe from any one discovering that he slept with wet eyelashes. He found it out himself, though, in the morning, and was ashamed for a moment. Then he looked out of the window, and forgot to be self-conscious, seeing a new heaven and a new earth.

Then followed glorious days ; long days of wonder and rejoicing, radiant with light and song and colour, or veiled in solemn clouds and mystery. Of course there were the usual annoyances ; church on Sunday, school on week-days, family prayers and Bible-readings, Aunt Sarah and Uncle Josiah. But these disturbances, after all, were temporary and unimportant ; he had never realised before

how few of the twenty-four hours they filled how wide and wonderful were those remaining. Sunday passed, and Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday; and the first rapture of his awakening still encircled him about; since Saturday he had not fought or quarrelled, had played no tricks and given no trouble either at home or in school. Four consecutive days without so much as a reprimand were a new record in his life; according to his social traditions and standard of conduct a disgraceful one; but it did not occur to him to think about the matter at all; he was behaving like the "good boys" that he held in contempt, and had not even found it out, so absorbed he was in the joy of life, in splendours of sunlight and starlight, in shining sands and glittering foam.

On Monday night there had been a thunderstorm; and he had slipped out, unobserved, into the roaring blackness of the moor, to lie bareheaded on the heather in a torrent of rain. Then had come Tuesday, soft and cool and silver-grey, with tender shadows over land and sea, after the turbulent glories

of the lightning god. Surely there was never any world so beautiful, or any boy so happy, so splendidly alive.

But the divinest day was Wednesday. From the fire-opal of the sunrise to the cloudy amethyst of twilight, it was a day of jewels ; a day of sapphire sea and diamond spray, of skylarks singing in far blue heights and sunbeams flaming on the yellow gorse ; a day of peace on earth and goodwill—even—
toward men. One could not hate uncle himself on such a day.

Jack was up with the dawn and on the beach before sunrise. It was low water, and he scrambled out on to the long, jagged reef which had caused so many wrecks that the precipice above it was called "Deadman's Cliff." When he was tired of slipping about on the tangle and cutting his feet with the sharp points of barnacles, he lay down beside a shallow rock pool and looked into the sunlit water. It was full of brilliant anemones, green and pink and orange, open wide and holding up hundreds of painted arms. In one corner was a fairy forest of zoöphytes,

with a sea-snail trying earnestly to force passage through.

Suddenly, behind a little clump of seaweed, there was a flash of prismatic colour, and silken ripples passed over the surface of the pool. He lay still, watching. Presently a tiny fish, some two inches long, slipped out through the sea-weed and began to swim round and round the pool, glittering in pink and silver. He plunged his hand into the water with a swift, dexterous movement, and caught the fish.

He lifted the little creature and held it in the sunshine, watching the flashing colours pass and change along its sides as it plunged and struggled in his hand. Then suddenly he saw how beautiful it was, and put it gently back into the water, and let it dart away. One had no right to interfere with a thing whose body was made all of rainbows.

His hand was still lying in the water, and he glanced down at it carelessly. There were no rainbows on it; but it was beautiful; more beautiful even than the fish. He opened and shut it under the water; and

atched the working of the muscles, and the strong, smooth curve of the wrist. Yes, it was beautiful, and it was a part of him.

That afternoon was again a half-holiday. Billy Greggs had suggested that they should go fishing, as Saturday's expedition had not come off; but Jack refused; he wanted to be quite alone, and clamber on the rocks and look down through deep fissures at the ebbing tide.

Starting off after early dinner, with a pocketful of cherries and a drag-net for deep rock pools, he came upon Molly sitting alone in the garden with her head buried in the big lavender bush.

"Hullo, Moll!" he said cheerfully as he passed.

There was no answer, and he saw her shoulders shake a little; she was crying. He turned back.

"Why, what's wrong? Uncle been nagging again?"

She lifted up a tear-stained face.

"I'm to stop in . . . all the afternoon! And I did want to go and take Daisy to bathe: Dr. Jenkins ordered her sea-baths!"

Daisy, the broken-nosed doll lying on the grass beside her, was too far gone for any sea-baths to help, or, for that matter, to injure; but Molly could scarcely be expected to realise that.

“It’s a jolly shame!” said Jack indignantly; he had been kept in so often himself that he could feel for her. “Poor old girl! What had you been doing?”

The question brought a burst of tears.

“I hadn’t done anything! I wouldn’t mind if I’d been naughty, but I hadn’t! It’s only because Mary Anne’s cooking, and uncle says I mustn’t go alone.”

“But you don’t go out with Mary Anne other days. Where are those girls you always play with?”

“Emma’s away from home, and Janey Scott couldn’t come. I can’t help that! If I’d been naughty it would have been just the same. It’s not fair.”

Jack’s forehead contracted; this was an echo of his own grievance. Either things should be arranged according to convenience, and there should be no rewards and punish-

ments at all, or people should be punished only when they were to blame. Uncle, and, apparently, uncle's God, had a very elaborate system for dealing with offenders according to their deserts ; but the practical result of it seemed always to be that, if you were unlucky, you were punished for your misfortunes. He glanced at the sunlit cliffs with a sigh ; he had been counting so on a perfect holiday alone.

“ Don't cry, old girl,” he said. “ Let's go and ask Aunt Sarah whether you may come with me.”

Mr. Raymond, fortunately, was out ; and Aunt Sarah, though a little surprised at so unusual a request from Jack, who was generally the most unsociable of boys, made no difficulties ; so the two children went down the steep lane together, Jack a little sobered and trying not to feel disappointed, Molly trotting beside him, radiant with happiness.

In ten minutes he had forgotten all about his disappointment. More delightful even than the flashing water itself was Molly's joy in it. With amazement he discovered that

this little creature, whom he had always looked down upon, possessed, at nine years old, a sense of beauty to which he, with all his superiority of a big boy, had only now awaked. She hugged herself with ecstasy at the sight of the green waves dashing up between wet rocks and flinging showers of bright spray into the sunlight. He took her to a favourite spot of his ; a narrow rock platform on which one could kneel beside a hole in the granite, and look through into a cavern far below where the water foamed and thundered. As he knelt with his arm about her, holding her carefully so that she should not fall, he felt the little body quiver against his side, and drew her back from the edge of the hole.

“Don’t be frightened ! I won’t let you fall.”

Then he saw that it was not fear which made her tremble. Her eyes were big and shining as she looked up at him.

“Jack,” she said, “do you think God lives down there ?”

When the tide ebbed he took her down to the reef and showed her wonderful things. They fed anemones with scraps of dead

limpets tied with strands of Molly's hair, which she tugged out in the recklessness of her excitement; and drew the bait up again, half-devoured, to see the anemone "turn sulky" and shrink into a shapeless lump of jelly. They undressed Daisy and bathed her solemnly, and dried her with grubby pocket-handkerchiefs, and plastered her broken nose with slimy sea-weed; oh, if the Gang had seen its captain playing with his sister's doll! They caught a shrimp, and mimicked his hideous face, and let him go again. At last they sat down side by side to eat their cherries, their naked feet in a rock pool.

Molly threw a cherry stone into the pool; and presently Jack heard her telling a story to herself as she leaned over looking down into the water; she had quite got over her shyness with him now.

" . . . So the cherry tree grew up in the sea, and was a sea cherry tree; and there were sea cherries all over it. . . . And one day the shrimp came by and saw the sea cherries, and he thought: 'I must take some of those home for my baby shrimps.' . . . "

"Molly," said Jack suddenly, "do you ever tell stories to Aunt Sarah? No, I don't mean fibs—of course everybody tells fibs; I mean stories about shrimps, and cherries, and things?"

She looked round, shocked at such a question.

"Why, no!"

Jack was quite abashed.

"Oh, well," he said apologetically, "I couldn't know, you see. I thought, perhaps, as you're good, and she likes you . . ."

"It's the easiest way," she answered seriously; "if you're good, they let you alone."

To Jack the answer was a revelation. So Molly, too, lived in a secret world that was all her own, and kept the grown-ups and their dirty hands at arm's length! Her goodness and his badness were means to the same end; the difference was only one of method.

"The plucky little scrap of a thing!" he thought; and looked at her with new respect.

When all the cherries were eaten Molly lay down on the warm rock and went to sleep with her tumbled head against her arm.

Jack put her hat over her eyes to shade them from the sun, and sat still, looking out across the blue, shimmering water. Presently he turned and looked down at Molly. She was fast asleep. One bare foot was tucked up under her; the other lay stretched out on the rock, the smooth, clear skin still wet and glistening in the sun. He sat still for a long time, looking at her very solemnly; then he bent down and stroked the little naked foot. It was the first voluntary caress that he had given in his life to any human creature.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. HEWITT was very grave and silent in school on Thursday morning. He passed over mistakes and wrote wrong figures on the blackboard, and had dark lines under his eyes, as if he had slept badly or had a tooth-ache.

In the middle of the history class the curate came in hastily with an anxious look, and said: "Come out here a minute, will you, Hewitt? I want to speak to you."

They went out of the room, and for some time the boys yawned and fidgetted, lolling at their desks.

"Hullo!" said Charlie Thompson, who was looking out of the window. "That's the Roscoe girl."

Jim Greaves sprang up with a quick, startled cry; and then sat down again. Jack glanced carelessly out of the window. Maggie Roscoe was walking away down the

road, clinging to the curate's arm, and sobbing bitterly.

"I wonder what's wrong with her?" he thought; and, then, after a moment: "And what's wrong with everybody? All the school's in the dumps to-day."

Mr. Hewitt came back and went on with the class; but his hand was shaking as he held the book.

Presently he pulled himself together and began irritably cross-examining the boys and finding fault over trifles. He was usually a patient teacher, if a dull one; but now everything seemed to annoy him. When the morning classes were finished, he called up Jack and reprimanded him sharply before the school. A window had been found to be broken.

"You were seen pitching up stones in the road yesterday. That makes the third pane of glass this term!"

Jack shrugged his shoulders. He had not been throwing stones, and had picked up the pebbles only because of their coloured markings; but if Mr. Hewitt chose to put himself

in the wrong by taking things for granted, why should one undeceive him?

"It was the cat that broke the window, sir," one of the boys put in. "I saw her; there was a dog after her, and she jumped up and sent a flower-pot through."

"Oh," said Mr. Hewitt absently; "is that so?"

Jack went out with the sullen face which he had not worn since Saturday. What a mean lot they were! Let them once get a spite against a fellow, and they would always be ready to put anything on to him, without stopping to ask who was to blame. And he had got to be at the orders of an ass like that. . . .

Yes, but he would be a man some day; and then he would never be at anybody's orders any more. Uncle and the other cads could do their worst; what did it all matter when their time was so short? Nothing matters when one is going to be free. He had never thought of that before; now it burst upon him suddenly, a splendid light of promise. He walked down the lane with shining eyes;

only a few more years now, and he would be a man.

By the afternoon Mr. Hewitt had recovered his self-command; but he was more gloomy than ever, and gave short, impatient answers to the questions put to him. Some of the elder boys seemed as much upset as the schoolmaster; and at closing-time the class melted away silently, without any of the usual tricks and laughter.

Jack, for his part, shouldered his books and ran home at the top of his speed. If he made haste he could get his preparation finished and be out before sunset.

He jumped over the garden gate with the long, easy spring for which all the Porthcarrick boys envied him, alighting on the gravel with perfect poise and balance. Then he looked back to measure the length of the jump with his eyes. It was a creditable one for a boy of fourteen, and the consciousness of it thrilled him with delight. To be made so cleanly, to have every limb so strong and supple,—is that not a joy? He looked down at his firm, brown wrists, wondering how thick

a bough he could twist off from the fuchsia hedge with one turn of the close-knit muscles. But when he put out his hand to try, the beauty of the slender crimson buds restrained him; he had never before noticed how lovely was the droop with which they hung, how protectingly the young leaves were spread out above them, like the curved wings of a sea-gull. He raised the branch gently, shaking all the fairy buds, and drew it across his cheek.

A horrible cry broke out suddenly; and he let the fuchsia bough fall back. The cry was repeated; it came from the stable yard, and the voice was Spotty's. Some strange dog must have set on her—and Spotty was blind. He turned and dashed headlong towards the yard. The old dog's cries sounded in his ears, more and more piercing and lamentable as he came nearer; now there was another sound as well: the sharp, stinging, regular hiss of a whip. He stopped short an instant by the gateway, catching his breath; then opened the gate and entered the yard.

Spotty was cowering on the flagstones,

muzzled and chained to her kennel. She could no longer struggle much, and only moaned and shivered as the whip came down with its even, sickening thud. The Vicar seemed to put all his strength into every blow.

Jack sprang forward with a furious cry. The deliberateness of the thing, the muzzle and the carefully shortened chain, had set his blood on fire. The blind creature was helpless enough without all that. In one more instant he would have snatched the whip and struck his uncle across the face with it. Then he saw what the face was like, and drew back and stood still.

The Vicar looked twenty years younger. The lifeless eyes were shining, the nostrils had dilated, little quivers of delight played at the corners of the mouth. He was like a man who has drunk the elixir of life.

Suddenly he looked up with the whip lifted in the air, and saw Jack's white face. He started violently, paused an instant, then brought the whip down with a final hiss and thud. Spotty did not even moan; she was quite still now.

The Vicar stooped down over the dog, drawing a long breath. The hand holding the whip shook a little, then grew steady. When he stood up again his face had returned to its grey and lifeless habit.

“There!” he said, and twisted the lash round the handle. “I don’t think she’ll forget that lesson.”

Jack neither moved nor spoke. Spotty had begun to stir again and whimper faintly, her tongue hanging out against the wires. The Vicar knelt down and took off the muzzle; unfastened the chain, fetched some water and held the basin while she lapped.

“She’ll be all right,” he said, still looking away. “It’s a most unpleasant thing to have to do; but it’s more merciful in the end to give a dog one thorough thrashing, and not need to repeat it. She’ll obey another time.”

Then he realised that he was apologising to Jack; and turned round sharply.

“What are you doing out of doors before you have finished your lessons? I won’t have the preparation neglected, Jack; I’ve

told you that already. Mind it's done before I come in."

He went away and left Jack standing, white and rigid, with the dog shivering at his feet.

Spotty put up her head at last, to sniff timidly, and recognised her only friend. She crawled up closer to him for comfort, and licked his foot, whimpering softly. Then Jack sat down on the flags beside her, and sobbed with his head against her neck. He had not cried like that since he was quite a little thing.

He got through his preparation somehow before his uncle came in to tea. The Vicar always examined the lessons and was generally, with good reason, dissatisfied with them ; but he found no fault to-day, though they were done even worse than usual. The evening dragged wearily on ; it seemed to Jack that the clock would never strike nine. When bed-time came at last, he went up to his room, and sat down in the dark on the edge of his bed.

All the evening he had been watching his

uncle's face, vainly trying to see in it again the face that he had seen in the stable yard. Now, sitting still, with a hand over his eye he could see it. It stood out of the darkness, the blunt mouth sharpened and quivering, the nostrils full of life, the eyes awake . . .

There was, then, one thing in the world that uncle really enjoyed. For it was pleasure that was in the face, not anger. He looked quite different when he was angry. He would look angry, for instance, when he should find out about the stolen knife. . . .

Cold sweat broke out suddenly all over Jack's body. He put up both hands as a shield. . . .

At last he rose, lit his candle and undressed. He lay down in his bed, and the forgotten candle guttered all away and went out with a trail of acrid smoke, while he stared up into the darkness, as still as though asleep.

As he lay, the horrible thing that had come upon him hammered itself down and burned itself in upon his understanding. When the theft of the knife should be dis-

covered he too would be flogged. He would be handled as Spotty had been handled, and gloated over by that greedy mouth; he on whom no touch had been laid since the mavis flew away. As for all that had happened earlier, it was of no moment; he could look back indifferently on the self of a week ago, as on a stranger; he had lived just five days.

There was no escape; and no one would understand. No one, no one would ever understand that he was not the same now as last week; that the boy who had been flogged so often and had laughed at it was dead, and that the new Jack in his place had never yet been touched or shamed. There was no hope for this white, unspotted new self; only last Saturday it had begun to live, and now uncle would lay hands on it and it would die.

Awaking next morning he sat up in bed and wondered amazedly what it was that had happened to him yesterday. It seemed inconceivable that he, Jack Raymond, of all boys in the world, had lain the whole evening

and until late into the night, wideawake in the dark, telling himself over and over again, as if it were something new and terrible, that he was going to be flogged. He shrugged his shoulders and jumped out of bed. "I must have gone daft!" he thought, and dismissed the subject from his mind, as fit for the consideration only of old women, girls, and molly-coddles generally.

As soon as he was dressed he went out into the yard to look after Spotty. He had rubbed her carefully with liniment yesterday and made her bed as soft as possible; and she was now able to wag her tail feebly when he stroked her. "Never mind, old girl!" he said consolingly; "he's a beast; but I've got to put up with him too, and I don't care a hang!"

Having given Spotty what comfort he could, he went into the garden to see how the puppies were getting on. It was a lovely morning, fresh and dewy, and the clean sea air seemed to sweep the remnants of last night's mawkishness out of his head.

The tool house, where the puppies lived

was almost hidden by a thick growth of tamarisk and fuchsia. As Jack stooped to lift up a fat and cheerful puppy, footsteps crunched the gravel on the other side of the bushes, and his uncle's voice sounded close against his ear : " Have you seen my nephew this morning, Milner ? "

There was a tremendous hammer beating somewhere, beating so that the earth shook, so that the air was full of the sound. But that was only for a moment ; before the postman's footsteps had died away along the path, he realised that the hammer was beating in his own pulses.

He leaned idly against the fuchsia hedge. It was all true, then, this dreadful fancy of last night. It was ridiculous, it was impossible, there was no understanding it ; but it was true. He had changed, and the world had not changed with him. The things that were daily commonplaces to every one had become death and damnation to him.

But the day passed, and nothing happened ; evidently the Vicar had still not missed his knife. For three days Jack

waited, hourly, momentarily, for the thunder-bolt to fall. Every sound or movement in the house caught at his heart with a cold hand; the very lifting of his uncle's eyelids would bring the sweat out on his forehead. Once he got up in the night and dressed himself, on fire to go into the Vicar's room and say: "Wake up! look in your desk. I have stolen your knife." Then, whatever should come, this suspense would be over. But when he opened his door, the silence of the dark house drove him back, chilled with fantastic dread. On Monday, the fourth morning, he came down to breakfast so pale and heavy-eyed that Mrs. Raymond was frightened.

"The boy is ill, Josiah; he looks like a ghost."

Jack assured her wearily that there was nothing wrong with him. Indeed, what was wrong with him he himself could not have told her, even had he dared to try.

"You had better not go to school to-day," said the Vicar kindly; he made a point of always being kind when anybody was unwell,

d Jack hated him the more for it. "You n do a little Latin at home if you feel up , it ; but not if it makes your head ache. 'erhaps you were too much in the sun yesterday."

Jack went up to his room in silence. It was some time before he could get rid of his aunt ; she fussed about with well-meant importunity, till at last a ringing of the front-door bell and a sound of voices in the hall sent her downstairs to see who had called at so unusual an hour. "To see the master on urgent business," Jack heard the servant answer. He shut the door and sat down, glad to be alone.

His Latin Reader was lying on the table, and he took it up listlessly ; one had better be doing lessons, dull and unprofitable as they were, than brooding in idleness over a secret dread. He looked through the index ; bits of Cicero, bits of Horace, bits of Tacitus —all duller one than another. At last he opened the book at random, and came upon the story of Lucrece.

He read it through, not for the first time,

in the curious, detached way in which school boys read the classics, as matter relating the parts of speech, not to the lives of men and women. What was Lucrece to him, he to Lucrece? Indeed, had the story been of his own time and race he still would not have understood much about it.

A country boy, brought up among dogs and cats and horses, he had perforce become familiar with a few elementary physiological facts; but to connect those facts with the joys and griefs of human beings had never occurred to him. A splendidly clean and wholesome body; a healthy, regular outdoor life, filled with swimming and rowing, cricket and foot-ball, bird's-nesting and orchard robbing, and the absorbing responsibilities which devolved upon him as captain of a gang of larrikins, had prolonged his childhood beyond the age at which most boys begin to put away childish things. The one human passion that he knew was hatred; about all others he retained, at fourteen, the dense ignorance, the placid indifference, of a child of six years old.

He was in the middle of parsing a sentence when the door opened and Mrs. Raymond came in. She stood looking at him, with parted lips, but quite silent, and he saw that her face was white and scared, as he remembered seeing it four years ago, when the telegram came to say that his father was drowned. He sprang up.

"Aunt Sarah! . . ."

She spoke at last, in a quick, terrified voice.

"Go down. Your uncle wants you; in the study."

There was a rushing noise in his ears as he went downstairs; something seemed to catch and hold him by the throat. He opened the study door. By the window, with their backs to him, stood the curate and Mr. Hewitt, talking earnestly together in undertones. The Vicar sat at his writing desk, his grey head bent, his face buried in both hands.

Jack looked from one to another. The fanciful terrors of the last days had slipped entirely out of his mind; evidently some dreadful news had come, and his thoughts

flew, as a Cornish lad's will, to wrecks and disasters by sea. But the weather had been so fine lately, it could not be that; perhaps some one was dead. He went up to the Vicar, forgetting, for once, the long feud between them.

"Uncle, what is it?"

Mr. Raymond lifted up his face, with a look upon it that Jack had never seen before. He rose, brushing tears away from his eyes with an angry gesture, and turned slowly to the curate and schoolmaster.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I have to ask your pardon for this weakness: I have loved my flock for all these years, and if I have failed in my duty, God knows I am heavily punished."

"No one can blame you, sir," said the curate; "how could you or any one suspect?"

"If any one is to blame," Mr. Hewitt put in, "it is I, who am so constantly with the boys."

"We are all to blame," the Vicar answered sternly: "and I most of all. I have not

kept guard over Christ's lambs, and they have strayed and fallen into the pit."

He took up the Bible from his desk.

"At least, gentlemen, I will do my duty now, and sift the tares from the wheat, as is commanded in God's Word. You may rest assured that I will probe this matter to the bottom, not sparing my own flesh and blood."

As the two men went silently out, he closed the door behind them and turned to his nephew with a terrible face.

"Jack," he said ; "I know all."

Jack stared at him blankly ; the words conveyed no meaning to his mind.

"Mr. Hewitt kept his suspicions from me," the Vicar went on, in the same hard, monotonous voice, "until he had proof. This morning he held an enquiry at the school, and several of your accomplices have already confessed. As soon as we know all the details, the boys found to be guilty will be expelled. As for the man you dealt with, he has been arrested and is now in Truro jail. How long have you been spreading this poison among your schoolfellows?"

Jack put up a hand to his forehead. "I . . . I don't understand," he said at last.

"You don't understand. . . ." The Vicar broke off, and opened a drawer in his desk. "If it will save you from adding to your damnation by useless lies, there is the knife you stole and sold, and there is what you bought with it."

He flung the bishop's knife on the table, and beside it a large envelope. "You see," he added with a kind of dreary scorn: "you may as well confess at once."

Until now Jack's mind had been an utter blank; but here, at least, was something definite and tangible. He picked up the envelope; its contents, whatever they might be, would show him of what he was accused.

He drew out of it first a little book, villainously printed on bad paper, and glanced at the title. It was in English, but might as well have been in Chinese, for all he understood of it. Shaking his head, with a hopeless sense of living in a nightmare, he took out the remaining contents of the envelope,

a set of coloured photographs. He looked them over, one by one, first in sheer amazement, then, as some conception of their meaning gradually forced itself upon his understanding, with speechless, breathless horror; and suddenly flung them down in a panic of furious disgust.

"What is it? Uncle, I don't understand. Oh, what are they all for?"

The Vicar's smothered rage blazed up uncontrollably. He wheeled round in a flash, and sent the boy staggering backwards with a violent blow in the face.

"Is this a play-house?" he cried. "Am I to have hypocrisy and lying here as well as harlotry?"

He let his hand fall by his side and unclench itself slowly; then turned away and sat down with a bitter little laugh.

"I congratulate you, my boy; you're clever at acting—like your mother."

Jack was standing still, both hands spread out against the wall, as he had put them instinctively to save himself from falling. His face was as white as paper.

"I can't understand," he repeated helplessly. "I can't understand. . . ."

"You'll understand presently," said the Vicar in a quiet voice. "Come here and sit down."

Jack obeyed silently; the room was beginning to heave and sway, and he was glad to sit still for a moment, whatever was going to happen next. He did not think of resenting the blow or the words which had followed it; they all seemed part of the nightmare. The Vicar leaned on the table, shading his eyes with one hand. When he spoke there was a stony hopelessness about his voice which made his words sound in the boy's ears like a death sentence.

"I may as well tell you at once how many of your secrets have come out. We know all about the gambling, and the circulating of this sort of filth, and the practices that have been going on in the cave by Trevanna Head, and the seducing of Matthew Roscoe's daughter. She has confessed that the guilty person is one of Mr. Hewitt's boys, but she won't tell the name. I suppose it is not you

who have committed this last abomination ; an hour ago I should have believed it impossible at your age ; but it seems I have much to learn."

He paused. Jack was looking straight before him, his lips a little parted, his great eyes wide and blank. There was no place left in his mind even for amazement ; he seemed to have fallen into a world of spectres at cross purposes, a hollow, ghostly world, where he, and his uncle, and every one wandered through fantastic evolutions, like dancing shadows in a fire-lit room, void of all form and meaning.

"Probably," the Vicar went on, "it is one of your older schoolfellows who has ruined the girl ; but there can be no doubt that the ruin of the little boys lies chiefly on your head. Thompson has confessed, and Greaves, and Polwheal ; and their statement implicates you directly, apart from the evidence of the knife."

"The knife . . ." Jack repeated, catching at the first word which brought up a definite image in this ghastly confusion of dreams.

“It was found in the possession of the agent who sold you the books and—other things. He acknowledged to the police that he had received it in part payment of a debt for his wares from a Porthcarrick schoolboy, who had been dealing with him for some time. No boy but you knew where the knife was kept.”

After a moment he rose to leave the room; but paused and looked back with his hand on the door.

“Jack,” he said, “when your father died I took you and your sister in for his sake; but I did it with a heavy heart, for you have in you the blood of a harlot. I have fed and clothed you and dealt with you as if you had been my own; and now I have my reward. You have brought the abomination of desolation into my house and the pit of hell before my door; you have made me ashamed among my neighbours, and blackened my face in the eyes of my congregation. I thank God that your father is dead.”

He turned and went out.

Jack slowly lifted his head and looked

round him. A few images had begun to shape themselves, more or less distinctly, out of the chaos of his mind. One thing, at least, was quite plain: he was being made the scape-goat for some one; perhaps for the whole gang, but certainly for Billy Greggs, and for Thompson and Greaves and Polwheal. "Of course," he told himself wearily, "they knew uncle would believe anything against me." It was simple enough; he had been leader in mischief to all these boys; again and again he had taken things upon himself to shield them, accepting, for his part, as a faithful captain should, the smallest share of booty and the largest of punishment; and all the while they had been dabbling in black secrets, and laughing at him for a fool behind his back. Now they had turned and sold him to his enemy to save their own skins.

He took up the photographs again and looked at them, wearily struggling to understand what use or pleasure things so meaningless and ugly could be to any one. Then, suddenly, the story that he had been reading

upstairs came back upon his memory, and he understood why Lucrece had killed herself. He laid down the photographs and sat still.

He understood it all now, the mysterious terror of the last few days; the whole thing was so easy, so hideously easy and simple. You jog along in your ordinary way and live your ordinary life, until your uncle, or Tarquin, or somebody else—what matter for the person or the manner of the thing?—some one whose muscles are stronger than yours are, pounces down upon you, and does some horrible shame to your body, and goes his way; and you, that were clean, are never clean any more. Then, if you can bear it, you go on living; and if not, you end like Lucrece.

As Mrs. Raymond came in with tears running down her face, and clasped him in her arms, he looked up, wondering, in a dull, careless way, for whom she was so sorry.

“My dear, my dear,” she sobbed, “why will you not confess?”

Jack drew himself away from her and rose.

He looked at the photographs on the table ; then at the weeping woman.

“ Aunt Sarah, do you believe I did that sort of thing ? ”

“ Oh, Jack ! ” she burst out ; “ if you had ever been a good boy I would believe you, no matter how much appearances might be against you : but you know, yourself. . . ”

She broke off to dry her eyes with her handkerchief.

“ Yes, I know,” he answered slowly ; “ I’ve always been wicked, haven’t I ? I suppose I was born so. Aunt Sarah, if I were to die now, do you think I should go straight to hell ? ”

She came up to him and took his hand gently. .

“ Listen, my dear ; I’m not wise and clever, like your uncle, but I mean well by you. I do indeed ; and I think . . . perhaps . . . It’s partly our fault that you have fallen into the snares of the evil one. I mean . . . we may have been a little harsh . . . sometimes . . . and you were afraid to confess the first sin, and went on from bad to worse—and you

see—you must see, this is the path that leads to hell. Oh, my dear, I know it's hard to confess now . . . and your uncle is so terribly angry—of course, he's right, for it's a dead sin. But he'll forgive you in time—I know he will. And Jack, I'll do my best to stand between you and him,—I will indeed,—you'll only confess."

He listened gravely till the piteous, confused appeal was finished ; then he drew his hand away, standing very straight and still. He was tall for his age, and his eyes were nearly on a level with hers.

"Aunt Sarah, I think you had better let me alone. It's a deadly sin, of course. Is it true that my mother was a harlot?"

She drew back with a little cry of horror. "Jack!"

"Uncle says so. It's a word in the Bible. And if she was, I can't help it, can I? Anyway, what's the use of crying? It won't help me—oh, you'd better go away!"

"Go away," a hard voice echoed behind them. "A Christian woman has nothing to do with these abominations."

The Vicar took up the photographs and put them into his desk.

“Go away,” he repeated sternly. “This is no place for you ; Jack knows how to tell you of things that are not for my wife to hear.”

“Josiah !” she cried out, and caught him by the arm, “Josiah,—for God’s sake—remember, he’s a child.”

The Vicar turned on her with another burst of rage.

“A child ! A child who can teach me, with my grey hair, things that I—— Go out, go out ! it is for men to deal with such children.”

She went out, weeping bitterly. Then Jack looked up, and understood. He came forwards gravely, quite self-possessed now.

“Uncle, I want to tell you. This is all a mistake ; I know nothing about these things ; I never saw them in my life before ; I never heard a word about them.”

The Vicar took up the knife. “And this ?”

“Yes, I took the knife, that’s true ; and

sold it; but not for those things, and not the man that you said——”

“What did you sell it for?”

“I sold it to a boy—for——”

“To what boy? And for what?”

Jack stopped short. His heart seemed give one great bound, and then stand still. He saw once more the cage door opened wide and the happy bird, with outstretched wing darting away into a golden sunset, like the dove that returned not again.

“What did you sell it for?”

For an instant Jack paused, considering what explanation he could invent; then he resigned himself. Somehow, he could not find a lie to tell, nor indeed would lies avail him anything; and the truth was worse than useless. Even if he could force himself to drag into speech a thing so secret and holy, there was no one in all the world who would believe him.

“Oh,” he cried; “it’s hopeless! I can’t tell you; I can’t tell you—and if I did you never understand.”

“I understand enough,” the Vicar said.

swered. "May Christ defend me from understanding any more!"

He sat down at his desk, motioning the boy to sit opposite him, took out his watch and laid it between them on the table.

"I have given up what little hope I had of appealing to you by any other means than force. What I have to think of now is how to purify the school from defilement and how to protect the innocence of those who are not yet contaminated, and, above all, of your little sister."

His voice faltered for an instant; then he continued steadily: "I must know the whole truth, and I mean to have it from you at any cost. Do you understand? You have ten minutes to decide whether you will confess at once, or whether I must force you."

He leaned back in his chair. Except for the ticking of the watch, there was absolute silence in the room.

As Jack had said, the position was hopeless; the very quality of his innocence rendered it, to his uncle's mind, not merely incredible, but unthinkable. Virtuous con-

duct the Vicar could understand and appreciate ; his own was eminently virtuous, for his deep religious convictions had sustained him through a long and patient struggle with the unwholesome impulses which had beset him in his cold and morbid youth. Like certain mediæval saints, he had learned, by much prayer and penitence, to resist temptations which would not have tempted any healthy man ; had he failed to resist them it might have been better for defenceless creatures at his mercy. The diseased imagination, driven inwards, fed upon itself ; and the lust of cruelty had grown up, as a fungus grows, upon the buried rottenness of other lusts. It was now many years since there had been a page in his private life which he would have been ashamed for his neighbours' eyes to read ; and he held that every man can, if he will, conquer the impure desires of the flesh ; but of an imagination naturally chaste and clean it was not in him to conceive.

His thoughts went back to his own boyhood, to the time when, at sixteen, he himself had stood upon the verge of the pit. As

surely, in his most unregenerate days, he had never been guilty of anything so monstrous as the revelations of this morning; nevertheless, he had come near to being expelled from school for corrupting the morality of the younger boys. No irrevocable harm had been done; yet, after more than thirty years, the blood went up to his forehead at the recollection. He thought of his sullen obstinacy when found out; his insistence, in the face of absolute proof to the contrary, that he knew nothing of the matter; his panic of terror on hearing that his father had been sent for. He remembered how the iron-faced old Puritan had arrived, silent and grim, and had wrung confession out of him by sheer physical violence. "It cured me," he thought, "once for all; and it will cure even Jack, with all his vices."

As for Jack, he did not think, in any conscious way, at all; the lamed imagination stumbled helplessly among familiar trifles, falling upon now one, and now another. A red rose-bud was tapping on the shutter; and he thought: "The wind is in the south."

Then he remembered a stormy afternoon last January, and the slanting rain which had lashed against the fuchsia hedge, and Molly in the tool house, mourning for Tiddles.

The hand of the watch had crept past nine of the ten minute marks. He remembered climbing one day on Deadman's Cliff, and seeing a rabbit which some one had shot, but not killed, and which had fallen to an inaccessible place, and lay there, bleeding to death. He could see the quivering of its feet again quite distinctly, and the white tuft of the tail, and the blood trickling in a thin, slow stream down the grey rock face. Now again, something was bleeding to death, as the watch ticked. When the hand should reach the minute mark the thing would die; and after that nothing in the world would ever matter any more.

The ten minutes were over. Mr. Raymond rose and took the boy by the arm. "Come upstairs," he said.

They went up in silence into Jack's room; and the key turned in the lock.

CHAPTER V.

ON Friday evening after family prayers Mr. Raymond went up, as usual, to the locked gable room. It was after sunset, but there was still light enough to see.

Jack was crouching on the floor, half-dressed, in the furthest corner of the room. He would stay so without moving, sometimes, for hours together. On the table stood a plate of bread and a water-jug. There was also a Bible, for examination by the question must alternate with prayer and solemn exhortation, or it would seem too like mere butchery. The bread, to-day at least, had been a little neglected, but there was no water left in the jug.

Jack, for the most part, had been quite passive. He had not tried to escape by the window, yet the descent, though less easy than from the other rooms, was possible, had the idea but occurred to him. On Tuesday even-

ing he had sprung suddenly at his uncle and tried to strangle him. For one moment the furious pressure of fingers on his throat had made the Vicar wild with fear; then the boy had been overpowered and flung down on the floor. And then had followed horrors which would haunt the dreams of both for years to come.

After that his hands had been tied ; but the precaution was needless ; he had no thought of resistance. There had been some helpless, mechanical struggling, but nothing more. When unfastened he would cower down again in his corner, silent, understanding nothing. Now, as his uncle approached and spoke to him, he dropped face downwards on the floor in hysterical convulsions.

If, at the beginning, it had occurred to the Vicar as a conceivable possibility that any boy could hold out so long, he would certainly never have entered upon the contest; but having once made the initial mistake, to give in now would be the end of all his authority. And yet, he must give in ; his position was no longer bearable. The villagers

had already begun to whisper and glance at each other when he passed in the street ; and now this . . .

He fetched water from the next room, and tried to make the boy drink it. But Jack's teeth were set like a vice. When at last the dumb writhing stopped, he began to sob uncontrollably.

"Thank God !" the Vicar murmured. This, without doubt, was the final break-down of the stubborn will that he had set himself to conquer ; the hardest victory he had ever won. He rose with a long sigh of relief.

He had accomplished, without flinching, a very painful duty. He had disregarded not merely his own natural repugnance, but the tears and entreaties of the household, and even a grave danger of misrepresentation and scandal ; and, probably, he had saved the boy's soul alive. He thought of the dead sailor among the sunken reefs by Longships Light. "It wouldn't go on if Captain John were alive," he had heard one fisherman's wife say to another that morning. She was right. Poor John would never have had firm-

ness enough to drive out the dumb devil which had possessed the boy; but he would be grateful on the Day of Judgment if he found his son among the saved.

The sobbing had stopped at last; Jack was lying on his bed, quite still, his face buried in the pillow. The Vicar sat down beside him and touched him gently on the arm.

“There, Jack, don’t cry any more; sit up and listen to me.”

Jack sat up obediently, but he shrank away as far as he could. Apparently he had not been crying, from the look of his eyes. There was a curious glitter in them.

“My dear boy,” the Vicar began with gentle solemnity; “all this has been as dreadful to me as to you; I have seldom had so hard a duty to perform. But as a Christian man and a minister of God’s word, I will not and I dare not tolerate impurity. That this house should have been made a centre of defilement and contamination, to spread the poison of vice among my flock; that my dear brother’s child should have been a cause of offence to these innocent members of Chri-

has been to me perhaps the bitterest disappointment of my life."

He paused a moment. Jack had not moved. A sense of fear came over the Vicar as he saw how wide and strained the great eyes were. His voice began to shake a little. "I know," he went on, "that you now think me harsh and cruel; but you will thank me for it some day. My child, you have been in danger of hell fire."

The boy was still motionless; he seemed scarcely to breathe. The Vicar took him by the hand.

"But I see that your evil pride is broken, and that you are sorry for your sin. Come and lay your hand on God's holy Book, and promise me that you will abandon your wickedness. Then we will kneel down together and pray that it may please Him to forgive you this deadly sin and to lead you into righteousness."

He rose, holding the boy's hand. It was silently, furtively pulled away.

"Jack!" he cried out. "Have you still not repented?"

Jack stood up and looked round him two or three times, like a creature caught in a trap. His breathing had a sharp staccato sound.

"Are you . . . going on?" he said. It was the first time that he had spoken since Tuesday night.

"Jack!" the Vicar cried again. A slow dark flush went up to his forehead; the line of his mouth grew thin and straight. Something atavistic, something sensual and violent came over the whole face. The nostrils began to quiver.

"Jack," he repeated for the third time, and stopped a moment. "Do you mean to . . . defy me?"

They looked at each other in silence. Then the Vicar's eyes crept slowly downwards to the naked shoulder and to the straight red bar across it. The old cannibal craving that he knew so well was taking possession of him again; the maddening physical lust to see something struggle. He put out a greedy hand and felt the wound.

The touch sent fire through his pulses. Yet, in the instant before he gave himself up

to the pleasures of his damnation, he had time to see his victim shrink away as if from leprosy, and to think: "The child has understood."

Jack went slowly to the bed-post and put up his hands to be tied.

That night, when the household was asleep, he dragged himself up off the floor. He had lain there, shivering, his head down on his arms, ever since his uncle went out.

He looked round the room. No light was allowed him, but the night was clear and the moon shone in at the window. In the ivy outside a bird began to twitter sleepily.

He reached the table at last, and drank some water. After that he was less inclined to tumble down when he tried to walk, and managed to open the cupboard door and take out the candle end and matches which he had hidden there some fortnight ago. He had done it for a purpose, but what purpose he had forgotten; and indeed, the objects and desires of the Jack who had lived a fortnight ago concerned him not at all.

Having got a light he opened the Bible, and tried to find the passage which was running in his head. As familiar as he was with the Scriptures, it took him a long time; his hands were so stiff and swollen, and shook so as he turned the leaves. Besides, he was sick and giddy, and had to keep shutting his eyes to wait till the letters grew steady on the page. But he found it at last; the twenty-seventh chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy; the chapter of the mount of cursing. Then he stooped laboriously and picked up the whip. It had been thrown down on the floor, when at last the Vicar's thirst was satisfied. He laid it across the open book, and pressed the red lash down upon the nineteenth verse — "Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen."

Then he climbed out on to the window sill and let himself down by the ivy. He had done it often enough before, without any thought of danger; but to-night, as he reached the projecting ledge, the dizziness overcame him again, the wall seemed to sway and lurch

forwards and the garden bed below to rise **u**p, rushing upon him. He threw up his **h**ands and fell.

The rest of the night was a medley of **c**onfused impressions and strange things happening without any ordered sequence; impressions of its being very hot, and then again very cold; of huge crowds of people surging about noisily and fading suddenly away; of something burning, pressed up against his right arm; of tumult and of lights and rushing water; and, here and there, black intervals of **s**ilence.

After dawn he woke up somehow, and **c**rawled into the wood-shed close at hand. **T**here was little conscious purpose in the **a**ction; hardly more than the blind instinct of a wounded animal, to hide and die in some **d**ark place. He realised that his right arm **w**as broken; but beyond that he was not very **c**lear about anything, except that he was cold and giddy, and wished, if he was going to die, **h**e could die a bit quicker and get it over. **D**ying unrepentant after always having been **s**uch a wicked boy, he would of course go to

hell ; but that troubled him little ; it is a long time yet till the Judgment Day, and hell is as good as any other place when you feel so sick.

About eight o'clock the Vicar came down into the garden. His eyes were hard and steely with anger ; he had been in the empty gable room and had seen the marked Bible and the broken ivy hanging from the wall. What if the boy had run away and gone to the villagers, or to the Dissenting minister ? More probably he was trying to make his way to Falmouth, with some wild notion of going to sea. But there was yet another possibility . . .

The Vicar clenched his hands. " If I had only not touched him. . . " he thought ; and flushed angrily at the memory of the bare shoulder and the red wound which had driven him mad with desire. What had happened to him yesterday he dared not call by its name, even in thought ; yet he knew well enough what it was. All night he had been haunted by dreams that he had believed would never trouble him again ; he, whose life was so strict, whose imagination, for years

past, had been so steadily controlled. When a young man, just ordained, he had caught a rat one evening in his London bedroom after many fruitless efforts; the long search had angered him, and the creature, when caught at last, had died no easy death. Then he had gone out; and, slinking home at daybreak, sickened and remorseful, had said to himself: "It's the fault of the rat." Now his anger was bitter against Jack, who had been a cause of stumbling and offence to him in his sober maturity, and had brought back memories and longings of which he was ashamed.

The open door of the wood-shed caught his eyes, and he looked in. The figure huddled up among the faggots crept further into its dim corner. He approached and stooped down.

"Jack, what are you doing there?"

The boy shrank a little further away.

"What is the matter? Have you fallen and hurt yourself?"

"No."

"You got out of the window? You were thinking of running away? Stand up!"

He paused a moment, waiting to be obeyed; but there was no movement. He felt that his self-control was going again; this cowering impotence, this voiceless terror tempted him beyond endurance.

“Stand up!” he repeated.

Jack raised himself a little and looked up. The red flash of the retina showed behind his eyes, as the flame leaps out in a smouldering tinder heap that flares up, suddenly on fire.

“Well?” he said, “will you kill me, or must I kill you?”

A mist blurred the man’s sight; he struck out blindly, with a clenched hand.

As Jack dropped, like a thing struck dead, silently in a heap at his feet, he realised what he had done. In the first shock of fear he thought that it was he who had broken the arm. At his call for help Mrs. Raymond came running out from the house.

“Josiah! Oh, what is it?”

“Help me carry him indoors, and send for the doctor as quick as you can. Make haste!”

She bent down to enter the shed; but

stopped short, seeing the boy lying on the ground. She stood still for a moment, looking; then turned on her husband.

"What have you done?" she said.

His eyes fell before hers.

"I don't know."

She stooped without another word and helped him to lift the boy; and he knew, like Philip of Spain, that his subjects had condemned him.

For some time Jack only passed from one fainting fit into another. Dr. Jenkins, hastily summoned, looked round with a grave face after he had felt the pulse.

"Some more brandy; and get hot applications, quick! And send for Dr. Williams; I want a second opinion."

The Vicar was almost as white as Jack.

"Is there any . . . danger?" he faltered.

"The pulse is very low. Why was I not called in sooner?"

The Vicar moistened his lips.

"I don't know," he said again. Dr. Jenkins looked round keenly, his hand on the pulse.

"You don't know when it happened? Nor how?"

"No."

The doctor turned back to his patient.

By the time Dr. Williams arrived the danger of collapse was over, and the old man was a little surprised that his colleague should have thought it necessary to send for him. The operation of setting the bone brought on another fainting fit; but this time the boy soon rallied, and lay with half-closed eyes, glancing now and then indifferently at the figures moving round the sofa. He wished they would leave off pulling him about, but it was too much trouble to protest, and if he did they would probably take no notice; so there was nothing for it but to submit. When his uncle approached him he shuddered and turned his head away; otherwise he was quite passive and docile, but would answer no questions.

"Did he remember falling? Was it from window-ledge? When was it? How did it happen?"

He only shook his head in silence.

Then they brought him something to drink ; and he took it obediently, wondering why they could not let him alone, and why the glass should jingle so against his teeth. But he felt much stronger and more alive after it, which indeed was small gain. The position in which he lay was hurting him very much ; and he made several patient efforts to change it, stopping perforce when too many sparks danced before his eyes, and stubbornly trying again as soon as he could breathe. But he gave up the struggle at last, and lay still, biting his lip and wishing he were dead. It had not occurred to him to ask any one's help.

"Do you want the pillow shifted?" asked the Vicar.

Jack looked up at him silently ; and Dr. Jenkins, standing near, saw the deadly vindictiveness in the black eyes and bent down over the sofa.

"Is the arm hurting you much now?"

"It's not so bad when you let it alone."

"Does anything else hurt you except the arm?"

Jack looked round at him slowly, with grave contempt.

“What makes you think that? I haven’t made a fuss, have I?”

“Indeed you haven’t, you little Spartan,” said Dr. Williams, turning his head with a smile. He had overheard only the last words. “I wish all grown-up patients made so little—don’t you, Jenkins?”

Dr. Jenkins said nothing. He had keener eyes than the older man, and to him the steady, practised stoicism of this mere child was a frightful thing to see. The rope marks on the wrists had aroused his suspicions at the first, and he had been watching quietly. When no one else was looking he had seen the boy put up his left hand furtively, and bite it. The action had explained to him the savage little dints marking the brown skin in so many places; apparently the mere clenching of teeth had often not proved help enough. “You didn’t learn that trick in one night,” he thought; “and you know more than you care to tell. We haven’t got to the bottom of this story yet.”

Jack said nothing either, but his mouth twitched. He had had enough of posing as a Spartan, and would have been glad to sob and shriek like other children. But it was too late in the day to begin that now, and besides, he was too tired; so he looked out of the window and held his tongue.

"Do you feel better now?" asked Dr. Williams, seeing that the boy had left off trembling. "Then we'll just unfasten your things and make sure there's no more mischief anywhere."

"I think I saw a cut on the right shoulder," Dr. Jenkins put in. There was something unusual in his tone, so that Jack looked up at him again quickly and then dropped his eyes.

"Oh, we must expect to find a few little cuts and bruises after such a tumble," said the old doctor cheerfully. "You needn't shiver so, my boy; I'm not going to hurt you any more; that's all over. Hullo!"

He had uncovered the stained shirt.

"Why, what the dickens have you been doing to yourself? Tumbling out of window every night for a month? You never

got into this state by . . . Jenkins, come here; look at this child's shoulders! Why, it's . . ."

Then there was dead silence, while the three men watched each other's faces. At last Jack looked up suddenly at his uncle, and their eyes met.

"Jack!" the clergyman whispered hoarsely, with lips as colourless as the boy's own. "For God's sake, why didn't you tell me the arm was broken?"

Jack only looked at him and laughed.

CHAPTER VI.

ANGRY as Dr. Jenkins was, he held his tongue. His first impulse, however, on leaving the house, had been to make the whole matter public ; and it was only after a hot discussion with his colleague that he had agreed to keep silence.

“Professional secrecy !” He had interrupted the old man’s arguments, as they walked together down the lane. “And if I were called to a house and saw murder being done, would you expect me to keep up professional secrecy then ? This is not so far off it. All this talk of the Vicar and his respectability—thank Heaven some of the world’s not respectable at that rate ! I didn’t often come across things so bad as this when I was practising in the slums of Liverpool. One would think the child had been clawed by a wild beast.”

“It’s a ghastly business, I don’t deny,” Dr. Williams had answered mildly. “But what

good will you do to any one by exposing it? You'll ruin his career, there will be a horrible scandal in the papers, and the boy's position will be worse than ever. And then, think of the poor wife !”

But the reticence of the two doctors was of little avail. Probably the story leaked out first through the servants ; however that may have been, by Monday evening Porthcarrick and all the neighbouring villages were ringing with the scandal of the Vicarage. Even the intolerant, gouty, bad-tempered old Tory squire came down from his chough's nest at the top of the cliff to discuss the matter solemnly with the schoolmaster and curate. Seeing that there was no longer anything to conceal, and that silence only led to the circulation of exaggerated reports, the two doctors consented to tell what they knew. Mr. Hewitt then gave them a detailed account of the enormities of which Jack had been found guilty ; and the curate earnestly pointed out that the Vicar's action, “ much as all of us must regret it,” was, after all, only the result of too great zeal in the cause of public morality.

“And what’s all that to me, sir?” roared the squire. “You don’t suppose I need to be told that Jack Raymond’s a damned young scoundrel? Every cow in Porthcarrick knows that, and it’s nothing to do with the matter. If the boy’s too bad to live among decent folks, send him to a reformatory—what else do we keep them up out of the rates for? But while I’m lord of the manor there shall be no vivisecting and Spanish Inquisitions here, or I’ll know the reason why.”

In the end the matter was, of course, hushed up, though not without a stormy scene at the Vicarage. At any other time Mr. Raymond would have loftily resented the interference of outsiders in his domestic concerns; but the shock of finding out on Saturday morning how narrowly he had escaped a tragedy, had startled him out of all his mental habits. Seated at his desk, his head resting on one hand, his foot nervously tapping the floor, he listened to everything that his accusers had to say; and looked up at last, with a sigh.

“I have no doubt you are right, gentle-

men. I have been to blame in this matter but I did all for the best. A little injury to one perishable body seemed to me of small account as against the utter destruction of so many immortal souls. Perhaps, Providence having so greatly afflicted me in the character of my nephew, I did wrong ever to let him enter a school where he had an opportunity of contaminating others. I have heard," he added, turning to Dr. Jenkins, "that some doctors believe these vicious tendencies can be eradicated by a special course of hygienic treatment; but the idea seems to me to be based on a profoundly immoral conception. How can hygiene cure sin?"

"I'm not a theologian," said the doctor bluntly; "and I have been busy saving the boy's life—and his reason, I hope; not thinking about his morals."

A greyer shade of pallor crept over the Vicar's face.

"Have you any fear for his mind?" he asked.

Dr. Jenkins pulled himself up sharply, feeling that he had been too brutal.

"No," he said; "it's not so bad as that; but I have some fear of hysteria. The boy is suffering from nervous shock."

Mrs. Raymond, coming into the study a little later, found the Vicar sitting alone with an ashen face. He rose hastily as she entered; the consciousness that he had lost the respect of his parishioners was enough to bear, without the sight of his wife's swollen eyelids.

"Josiah!" she said with an effort, as he was leaving the room. He turned back and faced her proudly.

"Yes, Sarah?"

"When you go upstairs . . . would you mind . . . not speaking in the passage? It . . . upsets Jack so . . ."

"My voice upsets him, do you mean?"

"I . . . you remember calling Mary Anne last night? Jack heard you, and he went into a sort of fit. He's . . . he's very ill, Josiah."

Her voice trailed off into a miserable quaver. After all her years of wifely submission, she was ashamed of her husband.

She would have died rather than tell him so; and there was no need, for he had read it in her eyes.

Perhaps the only person in Porthcarrick who heard nothing of the subject was Jack himself. It was, of course, never mentioned in his room; nor, indeed, was he in a state to listen, had it been spoken of. For a fortnight he was more or less delirious every evening and some part, at least, of nearly every night. In the daytime he usually lay quite passively, sometimes moaning under his breath, more often in a kind of heavy stupor. If spoken to, he would raise his eyelids slowly, with a look of weary indifference or cold dislike, and drop them again, still in silence. His uncle's presence in the sick-room threw him into such paroxysms of terror that Dr. Jenkins was obliged to prohibit it altogether; but nothing else seemed to affect him at all. Even the daily ordeal of dressing the wounds scarcely roused him. On the first occasion Mrs. Raymond, who was helping the doctor, had burst into

passionate tears of horror and shame when the bandages were removed ; and the boy had merely glanced at her with a faint, petulant whisper : " I wish you'd let me alone ! "

His illness was a longer one than had been at first expected. No complications set in, but for some time he simply failed to get well. The arm was mending steadily ; even the lacerations were nearly healed, and he still lay in the same state of utter prostration, of continually recurring slight fever. With time and careful nursing, however, he began to rally ; and at last, one day in August, a listless, pallid ghost of Jack came downstairs to lie on the drawing-room sofa.

Little as it mattered, there was a certain consolation in getting well. People left off fidgeting about, and sitting in the room, and asking, " Does your head ache ? " and, " Did I hurt you ? " Indeed, when Dr. Jenkins said, " He's all right now ; he only needs to get strong again," Aunt Sarah and every one else seemed to feel a sense of relief in being able to avoid him. They still

treated him as an invalid ; arranged the sofa-cushions carefully, and dosed him at stated intervals with tonics and beef tea ; but otherwise they left him alone. Molly he saw now and then for a moment, a scared, shy creature in a pinafore, staring at him timidly from behind tangled curls ; she had caught the sense of horror and of secrecy about the house, and connected it vaguely with the big brother who was ill. He, for his part, would glance at her and turn away ; she no longer interested him. The worst was that, coming back into the life of the household, he must perforce meet his uncle again. Yet, for all his agony of dread beforehand, when the time came he was indifferent. They spoke of trifles, avoiding one another's eyes.

Out of apathy and blankness he passed into dull curiosity. His mind, that had stopped as a clock stops in an earthquake, stirred again reluctantly, but only to move round and round in one small circle, a lethargic bonds slave stumbling through careless repetitions of a task without a meaning.

ays and always it was the same riddle :
underlying connection between ugly
ings externally so different. That such a
nection existed he had no doubt at all ;
at it might be he cared little, yet came
ck to the problem day after day, brooding
differently, piecing out, bit by bit, a dim
nd shapeless theory of monstrous things
hat madhouse doctors know.

Fragments overheard, in far-off days before
the mavis flew away, of whispered conversa-
tions between schoolmates who had seemed
to him boys like himself ; phrases from the
Bible, read so often that the sequence of their
words had grown familiar, while yet they had
no meaning ; chance things seen on neigh-
bouring dairy farms ; scraps of old stories
from the Latin Reader ; the photographs
which had shown him what all these things
were, came back and ranged themselves be-
fore his understanding. Also he remembered
the look on his uncle's face that last night in
the gable room, and the faint foreshadowing
of that same look when their eyes had met
above the helpless dog in the stable yard.

Such a face, surely, Tarquin had worn by the bedside of Lucrece.

On the last Sunday in the month, Dr. Jenkins called at the Vicarage. Afternoon service was over, but the family had not yet returned from church. He found Jack alone, lying on the couch beside the window, staring out across the rain swept moorland with wide, hopeless eyes.

Like every one else, the doctor had taken the truth of the accusations for granted, and until now he had felt toward the boy only a cold and impersonal pity ; but at this moment he forgot everything except the desire to comfort.

"Don't you think," he said presently, "that you would get on better away from home?"

Something stiffened in the tragic face.

"Yes ; that's why uncle won't let me go."

It was said without any hysterical bitterness, simply as a statement of a fact.

"Have you spoken to him about it?"

"I asked him whether I might go to school in some other part of the country."

“ And he objects ? ”

“ Of course.”

“ Jack,” said the doctor after a pause, “ do you understand why your uncle does not let you go ? ”

“ I never supposed he would,” Jack answered quietly, “ when he can have the fun of keeping me here. Did you ever watch him train a puppy ? Uncle likes to see anything kick.”

His tone made the doctor shudder ; it was so still and murderous. A little silence followed, while the man frowned thoughtfully and the boy returned to his hopeless scrutiny of the wet landscape.

“ I believe,” Dr. Jenkins said at last, “ I could persuade him.”

“ Of course you could ; you know too much.”

“ Look here, my boy, I don't like cynics, even grown-up ones. Suppose I were to speak for you ? ”

Jack's mouth set itself in a harder line.

“ Why should you ? What is it to you ? ”

“ Nothing ; except that I see you are unhappy, and am sorry for you.”

Jack turned suddenly, sitting bolt upright; and some hidden thing leaped up in his eyes.

“ D’you mean you want to help me ? ”

“ If I can,” the doctor answered, perplexed and very grave.

Jack was crushing his hands together fiercely ; his voice sounded hoarse and broken.

“ Then get me out of this ! Get me away somewhere, so I shan’t see uncle any more. I . . . can’t go on here . . . you don’t understand, of course ; I’ll keep on as long as I can, but I shan’t be able to stand it much longer . . . ”

His speech faded out suddenly, like a gusty wind dying down. The doctor looked at him, wondering.

“ Let us be open with each other, boy,” he said at last. “ I know all this has been hard on you—brutally hard ; and I’m more sorry for you than I can say. I believe if your uncle had begun by trusting you instead of . . . well, never mind that. Anyway, suppose we try trusting you now. Most likely the real

reason he won't let you go to school is that he's afraid you . . . won't be a good companion for the boys you'll meet there. Isn't that . . . ?”

Looking round to put the question, he stopped short; the boy was watching him silently, with a look that caught his breath to see; a cold, secret, steady look from under lowered eyelids.

“You think that's why?” There had been a little pause; but at the sound of Jack's voice the doctor recovered himself and asked gravely :

“Don't you ?”

The boy let his eyes fall slowly; he had realised that Dr. Jenkins understood nothing.

“Did he tell you any reason?” the doctor persisted. Again there was a perceptible pause.

“He said he must keep the curse to himself and not let it loose on others,” Jack answered in his apathetic, passive way, as if speaking of strangers.

“I thought so. Now, a friend of mine is headmaster of a good school in Yorkshire;

and I think, if I talk the thing over with your uncle, he'll let me recommend you to him on my own responsibility. It will be a heavy responsibility, Jack, after what has happened; but I should just make up my mind to trust you. You wouldn't make me regret that, would you?"

A sullen fire was beginning to glow in Jack's eyes. After waiting a little for him to speak, the doctor added softly:

"You see, my boy, I must think of the others too. If any little fellow came to ruin through you, and it was my fault, I should never forgive myself."

"Then why should I go to a good school, if I'm so bad?" Jack broke in. "I've had enough of good people. Surely there's some one in the world that's bad enough already not to be harmed by coming near me? Why should I go to school at all? I'd rather begin and earn my own bread. I'm strong enough, and I . . ." He broke off, and then added with a little laugh: "I shan't be too particular. I'll go as cabin-boy on a slaver if you like, so uncle isn't there."

“Come, my lad, that’s nonsense,” the doctor gently remonstrated. “Think it over, and just give me your promise that you’ll turn over a new leaf and give up all those habits, and I’ll——”

Jack wrenched his hand savagely away. “I’ll promise nothing. I’ll find a way out myself.”

“I’m sorry, Jack,” said Dr. Jenkins gravely. “You’d have done better to let me help you.”

He had no chance to say any more, for the family returned from church, and Molly at once absorbed him. She was his best friend in Porthcarrick; he had conceived for her the peculiar kind of serious, fraternal affection which lonely bachelors sometimes feel for a very innocent and babyish little girl.

Jack had relapsed into his usual sullen silence. Till tea was finished he scarcely spoke.

“Uncle,” he said suddenly.

He so seldom spoke to the Vicar now, unless obliged to, that every one looked up.

“Is it quite settled that I mayn’t go to school?”

Mr. Raymond's face grew hard.

"Quite; and you know why. You have had your answer; now that is enough about the matter."

"Very well; I only wanted to be sure."

"You'd better lie down now, Jack," said Mrs. Raymond timidly. This conversation in the doctor's presence made her uncomfortable. "I'll come and read to you after Molly goes to bed."

Jack lay down. He had become very docile in trifles since his illness.

"Dr. Jenkins has promised to read now," he said carelessly.

The doctor looked round in surprise; he had made no such promise. Jack was looking at him steadily, and he thought again, how unnatural that suppressed intensity was in a boy's face.

"You mustn't worry Dr. Jenkins," said Aunt Sarah. "I'll read to you."

"Dr. Jenkins promised," Jack repeated. His face had set in the immovable lines that made it look like a mask; there was a violent domination in the black eyes. Dr. Jenkins

came up to the sofa. He was attracted, in spite of himself, by this masterful personality.

"I'll read if you like, my boy. What is it to be—a story?"

"A chapter, please; we read nothing but the Bible on Sundays."

"Are you sure it's not troubling you too much, Dr. Jenkins?" Mrs. Raymond asked. As the doctor turned to answer her, he felt the sudden grip of Jack's fingers on his wrist.

"Not a bit," he said. "I shall be delighted, if you and Mr. Raymond will put up with my reading; I'm not much of an elocutionist. Allow me."

He placed a chair for her, adding softly: "You'd better humour him as much as possible just now; he still gets a bit feverish towards evening."

She sat down and took Molly on her lap.

"I've found the place, sir," said Jack, holding out the brown Bible. "May I have the sofa turned round a bit more? The light hurts my eyes. Yes, that's right, thanks."

He was now facing his uncle's arm-chair. Dr. Jenkins sat down beside him, and took

the Bible. It was open at the chapter with the marked verse.

"Surely you don't want this one?" he asked in surprise. "It's the commination service."

The Vicar looked up uneasily. "You had better read the lessons for the day," he said.

"I read them this morning," said Jack in his indifferent voice. "This one, if you don't mind, sir; I've had to learn it by heart, and I'm not sure I've got it right."

The contrast between his face and his speech had roused the doctor's curiosity. "Master Jack has a will of his own," he thought; "I'm glad it's not I that have to manage him." However, he began to read without further protest; he was puzzled, and also a little bit amused at being domineered over in this fashion by a disgraced schoolboy.

Jack's lips moved silently as he lay watching his uncle; evidently he was following the text from memory. The doctor read on, passing the nineteenth verse, where the brown stain marked the page, and skipping

the improper passages, though his hearers knew them by heart. He felt embarrassed and uncomfortable, almost annoyed.

"I think we can find something more suitable than this," he said, when the chapter was finished. "Suppose I read the story of . . . "

"The next chapter, please." Jack spoke softly, without turning or removing his eyes from the figure in the arm-chair.

"Don't be troublesome, Jack," said the Vicar sharply. "Let Dr. Jenkins choose."

Jack's fingers closed round the doctor's wrist. "Go on, please," he whispered, without moving. "The next chapter . . . "

His face was still quite colourless and set. "I wonder what the boy is up to?" Dr. Jenkins thought. "Some devilry, certainly."

He was not so familiar with the Bible as the Raymonds were. Glancing over the opening verses of the twenty-eighth chapter, he began to read, well content to have got through the maledictions and come to the blessings. After the first column he realised what the chapter is about.

“Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store. Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out . . . ”

He laid the Bible down on his knee ; really he could not plough through any more of this.

Mrs. Raymond was quite white, and her lips had begun to tremble. The little girl on her knee was pale too, scared without knowing why. Jack’s great eyes had never stirred from his uncle’s face.

A kind of breathless hush had fallen in the room. The doctor picked up the book again, and went on reading, with a horrible sense that he was taking part in an execution. He floundered helplessly on and on, through the curses piled one upon another, to the tremendous peroration :

“In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even ! and at even thou shalt

say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see . . . ”

The Vicar rose from his chair with a smothered cry.

The Bible fell open on the floor. Jack was kneeling upright on the couch, with one hand clenched upon the foot-board, and looking straight into his uncle's eyes. Molly began to cry suddenly.

“Thank you,” said Jack, lying down again. “Uncle will let me go to school.”

CHAPTER VII.

ACCORDINGLY, at the opening of the term, Jack went to school. His point once gained, he had been quite docile about all minor questions. Mr. Raymond's choice had fallen upon a good middle-class school near London; and Jack, when told of the decision, had acquiesced with the passivity of utter indifference. On the last morning, when it was time to start for the train, the Vicar called him into the study.

"I think it right to tell you," he said, "that in giving Dr. Cross the necessary particulars, I made no mention of what I have found out about you. If I had done so, he would certainly have refused to accept you; and I have some doubt whether I am not doing him wrong by letting him take you in ignorance. But my chief reason for choosing his school is that I have heard he exercises a close supervision over the conduct of his

boys ; you will, I hope, have no opportunity to injure your schoolfellows. You start, therefore, with a clean record, and it rests with yourself to live down the past. But you must understand clearly that this is the last chance I can give you. If Dr. Cross sends you back to me, you will go to a reformatory."

Jack stood still and listened, his eyes on the floor. As he did not speak, the Vicar added in a lower voice :

"I suppose it is useless to appeal to any natural feeling of affection in you, or I would ask you not to break your aunt's heart, and not to bring shame on your sister. But for your own sake I beg you to think before it is too late. From the reformatory to the convict prison is only one step."

There was still no answer. He rose, sighing.

"I had hoped you would repent and confess at last. Jack, this is the turning point of your life ; have you nothing to tell me before you go ?"

Jack slowly raised his eyes from the floor.

"Yes, one thing."

He was grave, but quiet and gentle. "Whether you send me to a reformatory or not, I suppose I shall live, somehow, and grow up. You've got Molly here, and I can't take her away from you, because you're stronger than I am. When I'm a man I shall be stronger than you; and if you've been unkind to her I shall come back, and kill you. As for Spotty, she's safe enough; I drowned her this morning. That's all; good-bye."

He soon settled down into the routine of school life, and plodded through the first half term, making neither friends nor enemies. No one was unkind to him; nothing ever happened; he was not even acutely miserable. "I'm getting accustomed," he thought, with dull self-contempt; a creature that could placidly go on living after such violation of body and soul seemed to him not worth hating. Probably his nerves were blunted.

Of the old wilfulness not a trace remained. From the naughtiest boy within twenty miles round, he had changed into a model of docility; yet he was as little liked by the

ters as by the boys. His schoolfellows, the whole a very fair average set of lads, at first made friendly advances to him, and had been repulsed, not angrily, but with alien indifference. He no longer cared at all for any sports or games ; yet there was nothing studious about him ; he performed the tasks set him, but made no pretence of taking any interest in them. The one thing for which he seemed to crave was sleep. He would have slept, if it had been allowed, for fifteen hours out of the twenty-four. Masters and boys alike gradually came to regard him as a dull, apathetic boor, with neither intellect enough for scholarship nor energy enough for mischief. They thought him a coward, too. Before Christmas all the boys were called up to have their teeth examined ; and Jack, who had been so brave, trembled and turned white when the dentist told him that a tooth wanted filling.

His uncle had asked that arrangements should be made for him to spend the Christmas and Easter holidays at the school, and go home only for the summer vacation.

The journey, he had said in his letter, was too long to be worth taking for short holidays. Dr. Cross, though somewhat surprised at this request, in an age of cheap and easy railway travelling, had raised no objections ; and so, at Christmas-time, while his schoolfellows were merry-making at their homes, Jack wandered about the deserted play-grounds, and slept alone in the big, empty dormitory. It was at this time that he began to think.

The process of thinking was to him a laborious and difficult one. His mind had never been trained to such exercise ; nor had he the external familiarity with it which comes of living among thoughtful persons. Probably no member of the Vicarage household had ever thought, individually, at all ; family opinions and beliefs, none the less sincere for that, were inherited, like the family plate, and profiles, and virtues. The Raymonds lived, as other Raymonds had lived before them, and never asked of Providence : "Why ?" But Jack, left alone, sat down among the ruins of his shattered childhood and contemplated a tremendous question-stop.

He began to see the world as it had been a huge fish pond, where the big fish eat the little ones, only to be dragged up with a hook through their gills and eaten in their turn by a fearsome two-legged monster whose name is Death. Seeing that from this final dread there is no escape, he judged it a point of wisdom to keep the eyes turned away from that direction, and to fix them upon dangers which can be avoided.

His uncle had been bigger and stronger than he, just as Tarquin had been bigger and stronger than Lucrece; that, in itself, was sufficient explanation of all that had befallen him last summer. There was no ground for reproach, or bitterness, or anger; it was all quite natural. Like Caliban's god Setebos, the stronger creature had done as pleased him. For the weaker, one course remained: to harden his muscles and expand his chest, that when next a predatory entity should cross his path the balance of strength might not be as it had been. Thus, when his schoolfellows came back after the holidays, they found a change in Jack; he was as surly, as reserved,

as passively obedient to authority as ever, but he seemed to be waking out of his sleepy apathy, and now took an interest in at least one subject: physical training.

"Boys," said Dr. Cross on the first evening, "I want you older ones to keep an eye on a new boy that's coming to-morrow, and see he doesn't get bullied. He's a little foreigner, a widow's only son, and supposed to be a bit of a musical genius. He's only eleven, and I daresay has been rather coddled up at home, especially as he's not very strong— Of course he must learn to rough it now; but let him down gently, like good fellows."

Jack shrugged his shoulders as the headmaster went out. So the school was to be turned into a nursery for cry-babies and pet lap-dogs now.

The first sight of the new boy aroused in him a certain cold and secret animosity. The broken English and the violin were bad enough; but he would have managed to put up with them somehow. What he could not stand was the child's personal appearance. The seraphic little face with its yellow aureole

of curls, its great, startled, solemn blue eyes, set all his teeth on edge. This child, apparently, had always had "mothers and things" to stand between him and Setebos.

Dr. Cross was popular with the boys, and his wishes were usually respected, so on the whole the "kid," as the new boy was nicknamed, suffered less persecution than might have been expected. Nevertheless, when the monitors were out of sight, a certain amount of rather ferocious teasing went on ; and the child's first weeks at school were scarcely happy ones. He was evidently afraid of all the big, boisterous creatures who alternately snubbed and patronised him, and bewildered at these strange, new surroundings, so different from the esoteric world where he had grown from babyhood among shadows of his mother's endless grief and dim echoes of far-off tragedies. For a month he drifted between quicksands of practical jokes and whirlpools of ridicule, a solitary little figure, uncomplaining and very desolate, clinging tightly to his violin, and waiting for the glorious day when his mother should come to see him.

She had arranged to come once every month, this being the most she could afford. She was too poor to travel oftener, and too feeble in health to live near the school. She had a tiny cottage in Shanklin, and an income just big enough to live upon and give her child a good education. Everything that she could save out of her personal expenditure, or earn by painting fans and fire-screens was laid aside for his future.

On the occasion of her first visit Jack happened to pass through the hall as she entered and glanced round carelessly at the slir black figure. "Theo!" he heard her call, then the child rushed past him in a whirlwind of tempestuous joy, and he turned and went out, that he might not see them kiss. His heart was bitter in him against this darling of the unfair gods, dowered so richly with beauty, and talent, and a mother. "Molly two years younger than that wax doll," he thought; "and she's got to grow up in uncle's house, with no one to take her part but Aunt Sarah."

Two days afterwards he was sitting alone

in one of the playing fields, reading. Several of his schoolfellows were at play on the other side of the hedge, and their shouts and laughter sounded in his ears without arousing him. The game they had chosen was not one which develops the muscles, so for him it had no interest; he took part in games for training, not for amusement.

“I don’t know what you mean!” a piteous voice cried out suddenly. “And I—I want to go and practise.”

Jack looked up. At a little distance from him, by the gateway leading from one field into the other, stood a big boy named Stubbs, holding Theo by the arm. The scared face of the child roused Jack from his preoccupation. He laid down his book and sat watching. Neither of the boys had noticed his presence.

“Don’t be such a little fool,” he heard Stubbs say. “I don’t want to hurt you . . .”

The remaining words were too low to hear; but Jack had understood by the expression of the big boy’s face. He thought of Greaves, and Thompson, and Robert Polwheal; and

looked on with cold malevolence. So much for a mother's protection ! Surely the gods are just indeed, and mete out ruin with equal hands to loved and unloved alike ; to this end comes innocence too weak for self-defence. " You don't know what it all means," he thought. " You're clean, and your mother comes and kisses you. Next time she comes you won't be so clean."

" I don't know what you mean," Theo cried out again ; and, wrenching his arm free, he dashed towards the gate.

" You're wonderfully innocent," Stubbs called after him, " for a jail-bird."

Theo stopped short, stared at him silently for a moment, and burst into despairing sobs.

Jack had risen and was standing by the hedge. Something leaped out of darkness before his eyes : Trevanna glen, and the sunset, and the mavis . . . Then everything was blurred and dim, with a roaring noise that filled his ears and quick lights flashing in a mist ; and he was kneeling on the chest of something that gasped and writhed, and strangling it with both hands.

His fit of mad fury was over in a moment. He found himself in the middle of a crowd, evidently called in from the other field by the cries of Stubbs. Three boys were on the ground, and a fourth, one of the monitors, was saying in a breathless, injured voice: "Well, Raymond, you do know how to use your fists, anyway!"

Jack looked round him helplessly; at Stubbs, spluttering and choking in a corner; at another boy whose nose was bleeding; at Theo, white-faced and scared. He put both hands up to his head; he was still dizzy, and felt, somehow, as if he were back in Porth-carrick.

"I'm . . . sorry," he said at last. "I lost my temper. . ."

He went slowly away, his head bent, his feet dragging in the grass. The puzzled boys looked at each other.

"There, stop sniffing!" said the monitor sharply to Stubbs. "And you, young shaver," he added, turning to Theo, "run after Raymond and give him his book; he's forgotten it."

As Theo ran off with the book, the monitor turned back to Stubbs.

“Look here! Raymond didn’t start throttling you for nothing. The next time I catch you hanging about and bullying any of the little chaps, I’ll punch your head myself. Now be off; we don’t want cads here.”

Stubbs slipped away, meekly enough. “Dirty little beast!” muttered the monitor.

After this incident Jack waked up to find that his position in the school was changed. He had been so indifferent to his surroundings that he only now saw how universally Stubbs had for long been disliked and mistrusted by the boys. If the masters heard anything of what had occurred, they kept silence; but Jack began slowly to realise that his unexpected championship of Theo had won for him both the goodwill of his school-fellows and the impassioned adoration of the small creature’s self.

Theo trotted after him, indeed, like a “pet lap-dog,” often grievously embarrassing his idol by the ways in which his affection ex-

pressed itself. Jack would find his night-shirt carefully smoothed and folded, new laces threaded into his boots, the right page turned down in his lesson books, and early primroses laid on his plate at breakfast. This last attention, however, was too much for his patience ; and he snubbed the child so unmercifully that the monitors, disinclined as they were to tolerate friendships between little boys and big ones in the school, shrugged their shoulders and refrained from interfering. "The kid" was nothing worse than a blithering idiot, they decided, and Raymond was quite capable of putting him down.

But Theo's devotion was proof against a good deal of snubbing. "Little duffer!" Jack would mutter angrily when the child's name was mentioned ; yet he submitted in time, though with a very bad grace, and gradually came to be regarded as Theo's official protector and champion. "You'd better not bully the kid," one boy would say to another ; "or Raymond 'll cut your head open." As for Theo, once freed from persecution and

satisfied as to the two prime necessities of his nature, a god for his worship and peace for violin practice, he flourished and expanded beyond all expectations, and even blossomed out into the use of English slang and the possession of a huge clasp-knife, fortunately too stiff for his small fingers to open.

His letters to his mother were filled with the praises of Jack. She could gain no definite idea as to the cause of the fight with Stubbs, for Theo, happily, had understood too little himself to be able to explain. On her next visit, however, she obtained from him an account, given in all innocence without an comprehension of its meaning, of what Stubbs had said to him. That afternoon Dr. Cross came into the classroom and said to Jack "Raymond, I want you to go downstairs. Mirski's mother would like to speak to you before she goes."

Jack obeyed, with a scowling face. As things were not bad enough already, he had got to go and be jawed at by the other fellow's mother now.

He found her sitting alone, her thin hand

folded on her lap. As he came in she looked up; and he stopped short and dropped his eyes, with a sudden rush of jealous hatred against her child. What right had Theo to have a mother like that, when other people had nothing? "Nothing, nothing," he repeated to himself with dolorous insistence. He had never realised how lonely he was till he saw the face of the "other fellow's mother." Her eyes were like the deep, still water in the shadowy pools of Trevanna glen.

"Are you Jack?" she said. "I have heard so much of you from Theo; he can talk of nothing else."

"He's a little idiot," said Jack, flushing angrily. He would have given a year's pocket money to get out of the room. He resented her presence, though he could not have told himself why; the low voice with its foreign accent seemed to force itself on him against his will, and make him think of Molly, and the foam on the grey rocks by Deadman's Cliff, and the circling flight of sea gulls. She had no right to come in here and make him wretched again, just when he was

beginning to forget. It was nothing to ~~it~~ she'd got her Theo.

"He is rather a baby still," she said ; " ~~ai~~ knows nothing of the kind of danger ~~you~~ rescued him from. I could not go home without thanking you."

Jack set his teeth. How much more of this was he to bear ? She was looking at him now with a serious, scrutinising gaze.

"I thought at first of taking him away ; but I have been talking it over with Dr. Cross, and he suggests that, as you have already been so kind, I should ask you to help me. Will you let me put the child under your care ? Dr. Cross will see that the monitors understand, so you will have no difficulty ; and I am quite sure it will be the best possible thing for Theo. An older schoolfellow, especially one he cares so much for, can protect him better than any master could do ; and I know he will obey you. If you will take care of him, and not let him see or hear anything unfit for a little boy to know of, you will lift a heavy weight off my mind."

As she paused for his answer, Jack looked

. He was almost ready to burst out laughing at the brutal joke which the fates were laying at his expense. He thought of the Bishop's knife, and the photographs, and the threat of a reformatory. Then suddenly a lump came in his throat as his eyes met hers, and he looked down again at the floor.

"All right," he said huskily; "I'll see to it. He shan't come to any harm while I'm here."

She gave him her hand. "Thank you," she said, and rose; then paused a moment, looking at him.

"Theo tells me that the boy you fought had called him a 'jail-bird.' Is that so?"

"Yes."

"Do you know why?"

Jack hesitated. He had overheard vague hints about Theo's father.

"No," he said; "I . . . don't talk much to the others; and, anyhow, it's not my business."

"Have you ever read any Polish history?"

"I . . . no, I don't think so."

"Theo must have said something, and been misunderstood. He doesn't remember much

about it; he was only a little thing. My husband was a political exile—do you know what that is?—in Siberia. When he died there, I brought the child to France. I have always tried to keep the shadow of these things away from Theo; there will be time enough for them when he is a man.”

Jack went into the gymnasium, silent and very subdued. Helen Mirska and the things that she had told him belonged to a world of which he knew nothing. He understood only that she had talked to him, and gone away, and left him miserable. She, meanwhile, waiting at the station for her train, asked herself again and again: What is that child brooding over to be so unhappy? She had seen him for ten minutes, and had talked of her own affairs merely; and she read him as those with whom he had lived all his life had never been able to read.

In the gymnasium he went through his dumbbell exercises as conscientiously as ever; but for once he was not interested in them. Theo, standing in a corner, looked on, with wide-eyed admiration at the feats

his idol could perform. As Jack swung his arms backwards, clashing the dumbbells together behind his back, the collar button of his gymnasium shirt snapped off under the strain; and when he stepped back for a moment's rest, letting his arms fall by his sides, the shirt slipped down a little from the left shoulder.

"What a queer mark you've got on your shoulder, Raymond," said the boy behind him. "Is it a burn?"

He put out a hand to draw the shirt lower, but sprang back with a cry. Jack had turned on him, white to the lips with rage, the heavy dumbbell lifted above his head.

"I'll kill you if you touch me!"

All the boys stopped in their exercises and stared, speechless with amazement. Then the master's grave voice broke in: "Why, Raymond! Raymond!"

Some one took the dumbbells out of Jack's hands. He surrendered them passively, stumbled to the nearest form, and sat down. That horrible dizziness again, and the flashing lights and roaring noises. . .

"Oh, I can't help it!" he said.

When the lesson was over the gymnasium master went to Dr. Cross, and told him what had happened. Jack, summoned to the headmaster's study, went in, scowling, sullen, prepared for the worst.

"Raymond, my lad, Mirski's mother tells me you have undertaken to look after him and keep him out of mischief," said Dr. Cross. "I told her I was sure the little chap couldn't be in better hands. You've done him a lot of good already; I've just been talking about it with the monitors. You're a good fellow, if you could control your temper. By the way, if you should happen to have any little differences with the others, nobody will mind your settling them with your fists in the old-fashioned manner, provided you don't go too far; but you'd better not threaten your schoolfellows with iron weights another time; it isn't an English way of going to work."

"Very well, sir," said Jack submissively.

In the corridor a little hand stole into his. "Jack," Theo whispered, looking up with

soft eyes like his mother's, "is anything wrong with you? You're all shaking."

Jack stood still, feeling the small consoling fingers curl round his. Presently he pulled his hand roughly away.

"What should be wrong with me? There'd be nothing wrong, if people would only let me alone."

He shoved past the child and went about for the rest of the day with a hard face, surly and defiant. But late into the night, when masters and boys were asleep, he lay and brooded silently, hopelessly, for hours. He had thought he was growing accustomed and beginning to forget; and it was no use; after all these months he was as wretched as ever. Perhaps he should go on all his life, and never get accustomed. Why not? The scars would never go away; why should the memory?

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It was some little time before the pallor of sleepless nights began to show through Jack's swarthy skin. He was so superbly healthy, so strong and sturdy, that even if he

had fallen bodily ill he would have shown it less than most boys. But he was not ill; there was nothing the matter with him but sheer misery. Only as the weeks dragged by he grew more colourless and haggard, and the look that he had worn last August came slowly back into his eyes. At last the headmaster began to get anxious, and took him to a doctor, who looked at him in a keen, puzzled way, and presently asked: "Have you been upset about anything?"

"No, sir," said Jack, with his stolid face.

The doctor finally declared him to be "a little below par," and prescribed a tonic, which of course did no good. "I wonder what's the matter with that boy Raymond," said Dr. Cross to the mathematical master. "Do you think he's moping?"

"Hardly; he seems too stolid a creature to mope much. But one never can tell; perhaps he's a bit homesick."

Jack, meanwhile, trod nightly dumb and barefoot through hell-fire.

The days were not so bad; there were always lessons and games, and the presence

of his schoolfellows. He took no interest in any of these distractions ; but they filled up time and space and kept other things away. Yet sometimes, even in the middle of cricket or football, the thought of the coming night would strike at his heart. At evening, when the boys trooped up to the dormitory, he would tumble into bed with a wooden face and a sullen "good-night," and lie breathing evenly with the counterpane drawn up over his head, while the others undressed. It seemed to him that he must go mad if he should see the white, smooth, unscarred shoulders of all these happy creatures. They used to call him "The dormouse"; it had become a standing joke among them that he was always the first to sleep and the last to wake. Then, when the lights were out and the whispering between the beds had stopped, he would sit up alone, and fight with demons in the dark, helpless against a ghostly army, and crush the sheet over his mouth, and learn to sob quietly, that the others might not hear.

It struck upon him at times with a sense of

amazement that misery could wear so many faces, and that one could know them all, and yet not die. There were nights of fear when the furies sat beside his bed. He would fall asleep quietly, like every one else, to wake, quivering, from nightmares. Porthcarrick, his teeth knocking together against damp skin drawn up beneath the roots of his hair. There were nights of rage, when he would clench his hands and grit his teeth with hatred of the God, Whoever He might be, Who had made the world so unjust and the people in it so wretched. There were nights of despair, when he could only sob and sob for very desolation, till his head ached and his eyes burned and the struggle to breathe seemed to tear his throat in pieces. There were nights of loathing and horror when hideous imaginations pursued him and the photographs glared out of the darkness whichever way he turned. But the worst were the nights of shame.

Of all torments the keenest was to see schoolfellows asleep. By day he now envied, now despised them ; by night he was ashamed

before them. He would sit on the edge of his bed, watching the long still rows of placid figures, listening to the sound of their breathing. Sometimes one would turn over with a sigh, or another would fling a bare arm out upon the coverlet; and to the desolate onlooker the sight was as the stab of a knife. They seemed to him so beautiful, so intolerably white and clean; what place had he among them? They had no evil dreams, no secret horrors, no shameful scars to hide; they had not been dragged through the byways of hell or polluted with the knowledge of a man's damnation . . . Then he would lie down and hide his face against the pillow, and tell himself that he must get accustomed; that what is done is done; that his body had been utterly defiled; that he should never be clean again.

The Easter holidays were close at hand, and a flutter of excitement had begun in the school. To Jack the prospect of solitude and silence was now a relief, now an added terror. Suddenly it flashed upon him that only four months remained till the long summer vaca-

tion ; and that then he should have to go home. Somehow, he had never thought of that before.

Now this new dread took possession of him so wholly that all lesser griefs were driven out. Fear walked behind him all day long, and caught him by the throat when night came on. "Four months," he would repeat to himself "four months !" four months to decide in, to make up his mind, to think of a plan. He must run away, drown himself, escape somehow—anyhow. To go back to Porthcarrick would drive him mad.

"Raymond," said Dr. Cross, on the last Monday of the term, "you remember it was arranged that you should spend Easter here ? I find now that it can't be managed because of the spring cleaning ; so I wrote to ask your uncle if he could make it convenient to have you home, and he wires that he'll expect you next Saturday. I'm glad, for I think a scamper on the moors will do you good."

The spring cleaning difficulty was a kind of fiction, Dr. Cross having decided that the boy must be homesick.

Jack went out into the playing fields with a face of stone. His four months' grace had vanished, and he must decide now what he would do. He walked straight before him, thinking, his eyes on the ground.

He might run away. But there was the risk of being caught and taken home by force. Also, to run away, when one has no money and no friend to go to, would mean a lot of thinking, and planning, and arranging; and he was too tired. There was a way of escape that was quite safe and simple, and one could take it without any trouble.

He walked down to the pond in the hollow of the furthest field. The deep water lay still and black, bordered by trails of leafless bramble and sodden wrecks of last year's rushes. He threw a stone into the middle of the pond, and watched till the slow ripples died away; then crept along an overhanging tree trunk, and looked down into the water. Yes, it would be quite easy.

Then in one instant the fear of death took hold upon him. He shut his eyes, that he might not see the water, and clung with both

hands to the tree trunk. "I can't!" ^{he} pleaded with the thing that seemed ^{to} ^{be} behind him, driving him into the pond. "Oh, I can't! I can't! I can't!"

He reached solid ground again, and opened his eyes. If he had only been brave for one minute, it would have been all over by now; but he was a coward. All degraded creatures are cowards; he remembered reading that somewhere. He was not brave enough to drown himself, or to run away; so he must submit, as cowards always have to do. He must go back to Porthcarrick, and see the wood-shed, and his uncle's face, and the staircase which they had gone up together. He would be put to sleep in that same room; to pass interminable nights alone there; and to see the day dawn and the sun arise and shame him, shining in upon the place where he had been tied up like a dog . . .

"Why, Raymond, what's the matter with you, boy?"

Jack put out both hands in the direction of the voice.

"I . . . feel sick."

r. Cross took him by the arm. "Come
ors," he said; "you'd better lie down."

he dormitory was quiet and airy. Jack
down on his bed, and the head-master
ght him a glass of water.

Let me look at your tongue. No, that's
ight; and you're not feverish . . . "

There's nothing the matter with me; I
got a bit giddy."

r. Cross stood looking down at him for a
while.

I wonder whether you've been feeling
er lonely, perhaps, as you hadn't been
from home before? I remember when
as a youngster I didn't like it at
"

ck clenched his teeth. Oh, if they would
e him alone, all these people! What
it to them? He was not going to make a
; he never made a fuss about things. He
d manage to bear it somehow, if they'd
let him alone.

You'll be all right next term," said Dr.
s. "Perhaps you feel rather a stranger
still, but you'll soon get used to it."

It was a little time before Jack unclenched his teeth.

"Oh, yes," he said ; " I shall get used to it."

The class bell rang, and Jack lifted his head from the pillow. Dr. Cross gently pushed him down again.

"No, you'd better lie still for a bit, and go to sleep."

The door shut behind him at last. Jack put up his left hand, and bit it till tears started under his closed eyelids; then he pressed it down over his eyes, trying to make shapes and colours come, and shut out other images. The marks of his teeth showed in livid crescents on the brown skin.

CHAPTER VIII.

"RAYMOND!" cried Theo, bursting into the form room. "Mother's come!"

Jack's head went down over the algebra book.

"Hold your noise, you little donkey! Can't you see I'm doing lessons?"

"Well, you needn't be so beastly sulky, if you are!" Theo was making rapid progress in English, and his unfamiliar elegance of speech had vanished with his golden curls.

"I only came to say that mother wants you."

"Oh, damn!" said Jack, flinging down his book.

He went into the other room with his made-up face, indifferent and morose. Helen's deep, compassionate eyes looked him over gravely as he entered.

"Jack," she said, "Theo and I want you to spend your Easter holidays with us in the Isle of Wight. Will you?"

He drew back a step, raised his eyes slowly and looked at her. Oh, it was no use to play a part; it might deceive every one else, but not her; she had read all his secrets from the first.

“What do you want me for?”

She smiled.

“Well, chiefly because we like you.”

“Oh, do come!” Theo put in. “You can teach me to row, and——”

“What do you want me for?” Jack repeated doggedly. He had come a little nearer, looking straight into her face. An insane desire to laugh was taking possession of him. Suppose she were ever to come across his uncle, or Mr. Hewitt, or Dr. Jenkins, and to hear what had happened last summer? Suppose he were to tell her himself, and let her choose whether she would invite him then or not? A kind of horrible internal mirth shook him at the thought of how she would snatch up her darling and flee. He had already learned that there are some things, to be accused of which is enough; nobody wants to hear about your innocence.

She came up to him, and put her hand on his shoulder. Well, he was behaving like a sneaking cad, of course, and sailing under false colours; but it would save him from Porthcarrick. And if he was such a beastly coward that he couldn't save himself the other way . . .

"Oh, yes, I'll come fast enough," he said; "if uncle will let me."

Helen stayed at the village inn till breaking-up day, and every time that Jack saw her the soft and pitying eyes seemed to shame him, "like a scat in the face," he said to himself. But who was he that he should care for any blow across the cheek now, if it was not hard enough to hurt? He lived in hourly terror lest the Vicar should deem it necessary to forbid his accepting the invitation, and to explain to Dr. Cross the reason. But Mr. Raymond made no difficulties; he was thankful for any offer which would spare him his nephew's contaminating presence at Porthcarrick. He satisfied his conscience by writing a long letter to the boy, solemnly exhorting him not to abuse the kindness of

his new friends. Jack read it through, tossed it into the fire and started for Southampton with Helen and Theo, saying to himself in cold disgust: "The filthy cad! He believes I'm all that, and he lets me go! And I'm no better."

All the way to Shanklin he kept assuring himself that he was going to enjoy to the full whatever pleasures the gods might grant, and put off thinking of anything else till the end of the holidays. He was safe for four months now, and could afford three weeks' happiness, surely. Other people were happy for years and years. For the first few days he wearied the household with his riotous high spirits; then, returning from the shore one afternoon and entering the little garden, he came upon Theo lying on the grass under the big laburnum tree, reading aloud to his mother, his head resting on her knee. She had one arm round the child's neck, and her other hand played with his hair as she listened. That night Jack lay and sobbed till he was sick and dizzy. Oh, it was unfair, unfair, unfair!

In the second week a new visitor arrived, a

grey-headed man who called Helen by her Christian name, and whom Theo addressed as "Uncle Conrad." He proved to be not a relative, but an old and close friend of Helen's family, and a former fellow-prisoner of her husband. After spending several years in a Russian fortress on a general charge of seditious opinions, he had settled in Paris, where he was now a well-known and successful musical critic. He examined Theo severely in harmony, and found so many faults in his violin playing that the child, when finally released, dashed into the garden, where Jack found him in tears.

"It's all a sham!" he wailed. "Those English music masters are duffers—they don't know anything about it. They said I was getting on nicely, and Uncle Conrad has done nothing but grumble! I hold my bow too tight, and I slur the phrasing, and I can't play a bit!"

"Perhaps it's he that's a duffer," Jack suggested, racking his brains for consolation to give. Theo sat bolt upright, scandalised at such a heresy.

“Jack! Uncle Conrad is always right about music. And it’s true, I know it is; I played hatefully to-day. I shall be just an amateur; I shall never play like Joachim—never, never!”

His distress was so passionate that Jack finally ran up the verandah steps to call Helen, as his own attempts at consolation had no effect. The glass door leading into the sitting-room was open, and as he came up to it he saw Helen and Conrad in the room, talking earnestly together in their native language. He could not understand the words they said, but drew back instinctively, seeing the look on her face.

“Helen,” the old man was saying, “it is a vocation, like the other. Who shall say it is less holy? I would not speak till I was quite sure; last year I only told you the child had talent. I tell you now that he has genius.”

“If it is his vocation,” she answered slowly, “he must follow it, and there is nothing more to say. I had hoped . . .” She raised her eyes suddenly to a picture

hanging on the wall. Jack had often looked at it and wondered what it meant. It was a large photograph of a group of statuary, representing a colossal seated figure of a woman, with torn garments and chained hands, and with dead and dying men about her feet.

"God help me!" Helen said, and covered her face.

Jack slipped out silently. He had understood nothing beyond the bare fact that she was unhappy; but over this he pondered gravely, never having realised before that any one else in the world except himself could have a secret grief.

Before returning to Paris Conrad put Theo through a minute examination, testing his ear in various ways. On the last afternoon of his visit, when they were all sitting on the garden lawn, he called the child's attention to the peculiar intervals in the songs of certain birds.

"Remember, Theo, you don't stop learning music when you put down your instrument and go for a walk; every bird has got

something to teach you. The best teacher I ever had was my pet sky-lark."

"Why, Conrad," said Helen; "you didn't keep a sky-lark in a cage, surely!"

He laughed. "We were both in the same cage. It was in the prison in Moscow; I picked the bird up in the court-yard with a broken wing, and they let me keep it in my cell. It got nearly tame by the time the wing was cured."

"And did it stay with you afterwards?" Theo asked.

"No, it flew away,—lucky little mortal!"

Jack, apparently, was not listening; he was cutting his name, after the manner of boys, on the trunk of the laburnum tree. He left it half cut and swung himself off the bench in his lumpy, coltish fashion.

"I'm going to look at the rabbits."

He slouched away across the lawn with his hands in his pockets, whistling shrilly between his teeth: "Said the young Obadiah to the old Obadiah . . ." He had been distressingly addicted to comic songs of late, though he never could get the tunes right, having no ear.

“Jack!” Theo cried, trotting after him ;
“you’re out of tune ; it’s F sharp !”

“Rather a loutish sort of lad for Theo to be so fond of, isn’t he ?” said Conrad, when the boys were out of hearing.

“I suppose so,” Helen answered absently.
Theo came running back.

“Mummy, Jack’s as cross as two sticks.”

“Is he ?”

“Yes ; I wanted to look at the rabbits with him, and he told me to go and be damned.”

“Don’t tell tales,” said Conrad.

Helen had risen with an anxious face.

“Where has he gone ?”

“Into the house. You’d better let him alone a bit, mummy ; he gets sulky fits at school now and then. He’ll be all right soon.”

“Take Uncle Conrad to see the rabbits,” was all Helen said.

She went into the house and up to the door of Jack’s room. There she paused a moment, listening. From within came a stifled sound which she had sometimes heard at night. She opened the door softly and went in.

Jack was lying face downwards on his bed, with both hands clenched into the pillow, sobbing under his breath in a horrible, suppressed, unchildlike way. She came up to him and laid a hand on his.

“Jack, what is it?”

He neither started nor cried out; only shrank a little away and held his breath, trembling. Presently he lifted himself up, and she saw that his eyes were quite tearless and dry.

“Oh, it's nothing.”

She sat down on the bed and put her arms round him.

“Won't you tell me? I know you often lie awake half the night; I can hear every sound from my room, you know.”

Jack bit his lip.

“It's nothing partic'lar, thanks! I've been a bit upset; and Theo's such a blasted little donkey, he can't let a fellow alone.”

“Is there nothing I can do? It's horrible to have a secret trouble at your age. If you can't trust me, is there no one you can trust?”

“There's nothing to tell. It's only some-

thing that happened . . . before I went to school."

"Last year? And don't your people know of it?"

Jack began to laugh. "All Porthcarrick knows; that's why they let me go to school."

She drew him closer into her arms. "Won't you tell me?"

He looked away from her, breathing quickly. "Ask old Jenkins," he said at last, huskily; "he'll tell you all about it."

"Who is Jenkins?"

"The new doctor, down to Porthcarrick. He and Dr. Williams both came when I smashed my arm, and he tried to come the soft dodge over me, just like you. I told him he'd better get me away from there instead of talking all that tommy-rot about being sorry for me; he wasn't sorry enough to help me."

Helen thought for a moment, silently.

"Would you let me write to Dr. Jenkins and ask him to tell me about it? You see, I can't help caring, when you've been so good to my Theo."

Jack pulled himself away with a jerk and

walked over to the window. He turned round after a minute, his eyebrows dragged down in the ugliest scowl she had ever seen him wear. He was rather white about the lips.

"All right," he said. "You can write to him: Dr. Jenkins, Cliff Cottage, Porthcarrick. Tell him I said he can tell you what he knows about me. P'raps you won't be in such a hurry to have me good to Theo then. I don't care."

He stuck his hands into his pockets again and stumped down the stairs, whistling, out of tune as usual: "Said the young Obadiah . . ."

Neither he nor Helen referred to the subject any more. She wrote to Dr. Jenkins, explaining how matters stood, and begging him to tell her what he could. On the last day of the holidays a fat letter came from Porthcarrick in reply. She slipped it into her pocket, that Jack might not see the postmark, and after breakfast carried it to her room. Dr. Jenkins wrote, in detail, all that he knew of Jack's history; as much, that is, as

his own eyes had shown him, together with what he had heard from the Vicar, the schoolmaster, and Mrs. Raymond.

The letter ended with a grave warning as to the dangers to which an intimacy with Jack was presumably exposing Theo. "In my capacity as the boy's medical attendant," the doctor added, "I made every effort to win his confidence ; but entirely without success. His disposition appeared to me peculiarly sullen, stubborn, vindictive, and secret ; indeed, before this unhappy business came to light, he had already, though barely fourteen, gained an exceedingly bad name in the whole country round. Far from regarding this fact, however, as in any way excusing Mr. Raymond's conduct, I believe the mischief to have been from the beginning largely caused by his systematic brutality ; and am inclined to lay the guilt of the boy's moral ruin at his door. I may be doing him wrong, but I have always doubted whether he was really innocent about the broken arm."

Helen read the letter over and over again ; she had sent the boys out for a long ramble

in the fields, and was free to think undisturbed. Late in the afternoon, when tea was finished and Theo was practising violin exercises in the breakfast room, she went to look for Jack, but he was not in the house. She returned to the tiny parlour, and stepped out on to the verandah. A sound of hammering came from the garden; and, looking down, she saw Jack mending the roof of the summer house. She watched him for a little while, noticing his absorption in the work and the masterly handling of his tools. Certainly he had a natural turn for carpentering.

“Jack!” she called at last.

He looked round.

“What?”

“Will you come in here a minute?”

“S’pose I must,” he muttered crossly, jumping to the ground with a splendid spring. His manners might be defective, but his muscular development was admirable.

He ran up the verandah steps and into the room, an uncouth barbarian cub, slamming the glass door noisily, stamping marks of muddy boot-heels into the carpet.

"What's up?"

"Sit down a minute; I want to speak to you."

"Oh!" said Jack, sitting down ungraciously on the edge of a chair. "I thought you wanted something done."

Helen looked into the fire for a moment before she spoke; and Jack, hunched up sulkily, with an ugly scowl on his face, drummed with his boot-heels the eternal refrain of: "Said the young Obadiah to the old Obadiah . . ."

"You remember," she began with her eyes on the red coals, "telling me I might write to Dr. Jenkins?"

Jack stiffened all over and sat up straight. The drumming of his heels had stopped.

"Well, I wrote; and I had an answer this morning."

He drew in his breath so sharply that the sound was like a cry. She kept her head turned away.

"He has told me all he knows."

A little pause followed, punctuated by the sound of quick breathing.

"Where's the letter?"

"It's here; but I would rather you didn't read it."

He rose and came up to her.

"Give me the letter."

She looked round. His eyes were black and gleaming, as his uncle had seen them in the wood-shed.

"Give me the letter."

"My child, I will give it to you if *you* insist; but I would very much rather *not*. And besides, there is no need; you *know* everything in it already."

"Give me the letter."

She handed it to him silently. He took *it* away to the window, sat down and read *it* through. Helen watched his face; it *was* pinched and grey, and lines came about the mouth which made her think of the changelings in the fairy tales, old haggard children who can never be made young again.

He brought the letter back at last and laid it on the table.

"Well," he said, "what's the next move?"

he made no answer. He came a step
rer, quivering.

‘Have you got all you wanted? I don’t
poking about asking people your private
airs. Jenkins is a dirty little sneak to tell
ou.”

His eyes were like hot coals.

“I told you you wouldn’t want me hanging
round your precious little molly-coddle, spoil-
ing his innocence . . . You know all about
it now; you know I was caught gambling,
and lying, and trading in all sorts of beastli-
ness, and teaching the little chaps everything
that’s filthy, and was pretty near killed for it;
and a good job if I’d died altogether! Any-
thing else you want to know?”

She rose and put her hand on his shoulder.

“Only one thing more, my child: Has any
one ever treated you as a human creature, and
believed your word—ever in all your life?”

He wrenched himself away from the hand,
and faced her, white and panting.

“D’you mean . . . you’d believe it. . . ?”

“I have not even asked you for your
word.”

Jack had still not understood. He put up a hand, and the fingers shook against his throat.

"S'pose I told you . . . it was all a lie . . . from beginning to end? S'pose I told you I . . . didn't confess . . . because there . . . was nothing to confess . . . because . . . "

She caught him suddenly in her arms.

"My dear, there is no need to tell me that of course I knew!"

Jack was sobbing now, in the slow, tearless, frightful way that was like the weeping of a grown man.

When they sat down together, she in a low chair by the fire, he on the hearth rug at her feet, staring into the red coals, she learned the story of the mavis, or as much of it as Jack could put into words, which, indeed, was not much. He told it quietly, without tears, but with pauses and intervals of silence here and there, much as she had heard other stories told long ago in Siberia.

But for that same Siberia, she too, like Dr. Jenkins, would probably have failed to under-

land. But she had lived outside the pale of men's mercy, and her unsheltered eyes had seen the naked sores of the world. Month after month of daily contact with criminals, idiots, and lunatics on the journey out, years spent among a monstrous population of degenerates in a land which has been for centuries a sink without a drain, had taught her many things. To her the Vicar's disease was no new horror; she had seen his like in every shape and stage, from ghastly children sniggering and leering while they burned a squirrel alive, to homicidal maniacs plunging into frenzied orgies, their hands wet from the gash in a victim's throat.

The story was finished, and both sat silent for a little while. It was growing dark in the room. Helen was softly stroking the head on her knee.

"Tell me one thing more, my son. What was it you were going to do when you got out of the window? To run away and go to sea?"

"Not to sea; only to the cliff. I'd had enough."

His voice was quite lifeless and dreary; utterly unchildlike.

“Old Jenkins is wrong, though,” he added. “Uncle didn’t know my arm was smashed; I took precious good care he shouldn’t.”

Her fingers tightened on his. “Because . . . ?”

“You see, I couldn’t manage to kill him; I did try once, and it was no use. So I thought I’d see whether I could make him kill me; then he’d have been hanged.”

Helen stooped and kissed him. The twilight faded slowly into darkness; a faint glow shone in the blackening coals.

“That’s why it’s such beastly rot,” Jack began suddenly, and stopped. Helen’s arm was still round his neck.

“What is, dear?”

“Why, you coddling me up and making all this fuss, just as if I was Theo. Oh, of course I’ll look after the little beggar, and try to lick him into shape, and not let the other chaps bully him,—he’s such a shrimp; but his wanting to chum up with me, and all that, is just bubble and squeak.”

“Theo is a little boy, and . . . has not gone down into hell, yet. His turn will come, when he is a man. But I think I understand.”

Jack burst out laughing. His voice sounded old and thin out of the darkness.

“You?” he said. “Rats!”

He jerked away from her hand and stirred the dying embers with the poker.

“You think, because you’ve seen prisons and things . . . What do you know? you’re clean. Your people may have been shot and hanged, and all that, but they’ve not been tied up and——”

She put a hand over his mouth to stop him.

“Hush! It was to set God’s creature free, and Theo’s father died to set God’s people free. Whose child should you be but mine?”

.

Early next morning, when he came into Helen’s room, awkward and sullen, to say good-bye, she greeted him in a cheerful, matter-of-fact way, as if their new relationship were years old.

“Then you’ll spend all your holidays here,

if your people don't object. I'll run down to Cornwall and see them, and try to arrange matters; perhaps they'll let me adopt you altogether. And about pocket-money, of course you'll share whatever Theo has, and I'll make the amount a little larger. It's rather a tiny income for three, so we shall all have to be careful till my two sons are grown, and can support themselves."

Jack muttered something sulkily about its being "beastly slow" not to be twenty-one. He was near to breaking down again, and his speech was proportionately curt and slangy. There were tears in Helen's eyes as she kissed him.

"And you'll take care of Theo. Since I was left alone I have been anxious about him, having no one near that I could trust. He will be a musician when he grows up, and musicians are not always the happiest people. But I shall feel quite safe now that I have you, who are so good to singing-birds. God keep you, my other son!"

It was the last time that the story of the mavis was referred to.

CHAPTER IX.

THE year in which Jack came of age was to him one of trial. He grew up, and entered into life; a difficult matter commonly, and in his case a grievous one.

He was studying medicine in London, and the more observant among the professors had begun to watch his development with interest. When he could get sufficiently far out of himself to throw off the laboured accuracy, the painful over-conscientiousness which usually marred his work, he would show a certain breadth of conception and sureness of intellectual grasp quite unusual at his age. More than once a professor, demonstrating in the dissecting room, had looked up in surprise at his questions, and asked him quickly: "How did you guess that?" But these flashes of sudden insight never came to help him out at examinations. At such times he always relapsed into the dull and docile pupil whom

Dr. Cross had known. He was too steady and diligent a worker to fail; but would pass ingloriously, by sheer perseverance, showing no trace of the special capacities which marked him as a born physician.

His heart's desire, never mentioned to any one except Helen, and to her but half-expressed, was to become a great specialist in the diseases of children. Even to himself he scarcely formulated this, his one ambition; but, hidden deep under the diffidence which afflicted him lay an abiding sense that he was called to this vocation; rather, that he held a claim for it upon the gods, as justification for faith. In his dumb way, half-consciously, he demanded this satisfaction of them, not repining nor in anger, but as a fair right, bought and paid for. Surely they would be honest for this once, and not repudiate so clear a title-deed. Seeing that he had accepted the curse of childhood as they had laid it on him, and had neither blasphemed against their ruling nor fallen by the way and died, it seemed but just that they should grant him, in return, a special understanding of the wrongs and griefs

of children, a special right to help and heal. If Dr. Jenkins had but understood . . .

In other respects his childhood had marked him less than Helen had feared. The trace of it showed chiefly in a certain soberness of judgment, the serious moderation of a too early maturity. Yet he seemed to her freer than she had dared to hope from any morbid taint of bitterness, and, if not so young as his years warranted, still, far younger than he had been at fourteen.

Of Molly he seldom spoke, even to Helen ; and she had often grieved over his reticence, dreading lest it might be the cloak for secret brooding. But, well as she had learned to read his character, she was mistaken here. He had trained himself not to waste his strength on barren yearning before the coming of the time for action. To rescue his sister was with him a purpose, not a craving ; when he should have hewn a foothold for himself it would be time to turn and stretch a hand to her ; till then he could do nothing for her but keep his face averted, lest the sight of her, defenceless in the enemy's hands, might dis-

tract him from his work. He had not seen her for seven years. She had been put to school in Truro, he knew; and, being now sixteen and tall for her age, was counted a young woman grown. "Next summer Aunt Sarah had written in her Christmas letter, "she is to come home for good, and help in the parish work; for I am not so active as I used to be, and your uncle is troubled with rheumatism in the damp weather. She had a fancy to learn hospital nursing; but your uncle decided that she would be more useful and safer from temptation at home, so she has said no more about it. She has always been a good girl and very obedient, and he is pleased with her."

The Christmas letters, one from Aunt Sarah and one from Molly herself, had been, for all these seven years, the only link between Jack and his old life; except, indeed, the formal quarterly reports of his progress which he had sent, as stipulated, to the Vicar, and the long replies to them, each containing a meagre cheque and much sound advice and pious exhortation. The admonitions troubled

little ; the remittances were the blackest blow left upon his youth ; a shadow of which Helen scarcely dared to speak, since she could do nothing to remove it. Once only, the Easter when he was sixteen, the look on his face, as he laid the cheque beside her, had made her break silence, putting up a thin hand to touch his cheek.

"My dear, you need never see him again, at least until you are a man."

"I have to eat his bread," he had answered in his slow, tense way. "The stray cats in the street are luckier ; they're not told who throws the scraps."

After his return to school, Helen, with her failing health, had made again the weary journey to Porthcarrick, and repeated her ineffectual entreaty that she might be permitted to adopt the lad altogether.

"I could afford to keep him till he can keep himself," she urged ; "and it would settle many difficulties. Once you have consented to let him live with me, why should you pay his schooling ? It is only right and just that I, who have the privilege of his affection,

should cover his expenses. It's small return for the benefit that his companionship has been to my own child. And the boy himself would be happier, too."

Beyond a little more compression of the lips there was no sign in the Vicar's face that she had pained him.

"It is not a question of happiness," he said "but of right and wrong. My dead brother's son has a claim upon me for food and clothing and for an adequate and Christian education and I will not shirk my responsibilities. It is enough that I have consented to be set aside and to let a stranger take the place which belongs in God's sight to me and to my wife. That the boy has proved unworthy, and that he repays me with vindictiveness and hatred are considerations off the point. It is my duty to provide for him."

Helen submitted; to press him further would have been to risk awakening his combative instincts: and if he should choose at any time to call the lad back home, she could not resist.

"I have tried again, my dear," she said ■

Jack on her next visit to the school; "and failed again. You will have to bear it as best you can."

As she looked up, and saw the line in which his mouth had set, it struck upon her suddenly how like the Vicar he was. There was a likeness in his speech too, when he answered.

"I'm sorry you bothered to go so far for nothing," was all he said. "If you had asked me, I could have told you it would be no use."

On his twenty-first birthday Jack received a letter from his uncle, inviting him to Porthcarrick for the settlement of business connected with the investment of the small property left by Captain Raymond, for which the Vicar had been trustee. "I have preserved it intact," the letter ran, "for you and your sister; and to that end have covered all the expenses of your minority out of my own purse. Being my next of kin, you will be co-heirs to what little I have to leave; so you had better know how it is invested. I presume also that, after so many years, you will wish to see your sister."

He replied stiffly and politely, declining

the invitation. "From my share of what my father left," he added, "I would ask you to repay yourself what you have spent for me, and if anything is left over, to take it for my sister's keep. I will try to repay you when I can what she has cost you. Of the money you speak of leaving to me in your will I have no need."

There the letter ended, with a curt: "Fare you fully yours."

For the summer vacation he went, as always, to Shanklin. Helen did not meet him on the platform, and he left the station with a sudden deepening of the grave lines round his mouth. He had been anxious for some time about her health; and he knew that nothing short of illness would have kept her in when he was coming. Approaching the cottage he stopped short, drawing in his breath; a great tangle of jasmine, torn down from the wall by last night's storm, hung trailing on the steps; in the garden border the red carnations had fallen over and lay prone, their blossoms in the dust; Helen's flowers, that were always cared for like young children.

She was in the sitting room, the maid told him, lying on the sofa. She had not been well lately, but had insisted on getting up to-day because he was coming. Going into the room softly, he found her asleep, and stood still, looking down at her. The lines deepened again about his mouth ; she was more changed even than he had feared.

When she awoke, he kissed her without any sign of agitation, and began at once to talk of ordinary trifles. She looked at him a moment, covertly, and saw that he had understood. "He is doctor enough to see," she thought ; "it will be different with Theo."

"When is Theo coming ?" he asked, as if he had followed her thought.

"Next week ; the Academy vacation does not begin till Saturday, and he will break the journey at Paris. Conrad wants Saint-Saëns to hear him."

Theo was studying music under Joachim in Berlin. He was to make his first public appearance in the autumn ; and great things were expected of him.

"I am glad to have you alone for a few

days before he comes," she went on. "There are several things I want to talk over with you."

"About Theo?"

"Chiefly about him. He has not . . . grown up as you have, dear; perhaps it is the penalty of his type of genius that the possessor, or possessed, of it never can grow up. You will have to be a man for him, as well as for yourself, after . . . "

The sentence was hardly broken off; there was no need to finish it, seeing that he had understood. He sat quite still for a moment; then looked up smiling, defiantly cheerful.

"Yes; it's a bit rough on him, isn't it? Still, some one's got to have genius, if the rest of us are to hear any music. It was kind of the fates not to curse me with it, as things stand."

She laughed softly and put a hand in his.

"In addition to all other curses? You have brought blessings out of them for an old woman that loves you, my grave and reverend counsellor. Some day a young woman will

love you instead of me, and you will grow young with her. I should be glad to see you young, once, for five minutes."

"There's no need, where Theo is. He is not just young; he is youth everlasting."

"Poor Theo!" she sighed under her breath; and Jack stooped down, for answer, and kissed her fingers.

"Mother," he said, with his eyes turned away, "you made me a promise last month."

"Yes, dear, and kept it."

He started and looked up.

"You went to London, and . . . never told me?"

"Of course not. It just happened that one of the specialists you mentioned came to Ventnor last week for a holiday; and I thought I would get the thing over at once, so I got an introduction, and . . ."

"Who was it?"

"Professor Brooks. I didn't care to write about it, when you were coming home so soon."

"And he . . . ?"

"Yes; it is cancer."

She heard the quick sound in his throat as the breath stopped an instant ; then there was silence, and he sat and looked before him, a stone figure, grey and motionless. After a little while she raised herself, and slipped her arm about him.

“Does it shake you so, dear? I knew it was that, and I thought . . . I thought you had guessed too.”

He looked round slowly, pale as ashes.

“I had suspected; but to know is different. Does he think . . . ?”

“He wants to see you. I told him you were coming, and he made an appointment for to-morrow. He refused to tell me any details; and even the fact itself he told me only because he saw I knew.”

Again they were silent. When next she spoke, her voice was lower, and a little tremulous.

“There is one thing I have to say to you and I want you to remember it all your life. You have been to me, without knowing it, the consolation for a bitter grief. It is the way of a mother, I suppose, to create o

of her brain the dream son that her soul desires, and to find, when she is old and weary, that the son she has created out of her body is different; better, may be, but to her a stranger. It is not for me to reproach the fates because they have given my boy artistic genius and the limitations that sometimes go with it; and perhaps he is all the dearer to me because his nature is to mine so new and strange and wonderful. But you, who have no blood of mine, have been the other son, the child of my secret hope; and I shall go more lightly to meet death because I have seen the desire of my sight, a son that I can trust."

For all answer he slipped down and knelt beside her, his head against her breast.

"I can trust you." She lingered passionately on the words. "I can trust you; and Theo will be safe. If I had not found you, I should have had to die—think of it!—and leave him alone . . ."

Jack lifted up his head suddenly, and she saw how white he was.

"And aren't you leaving me alone? Theo

—Theo will have me; and what shall I have? What else have I got in the world but you? What sort of life have you ever had? And now,—when I might have begun to give you a little peace and happiness—— It's unjust! It's unjust. Oh, there, don't let us talk about it, for God's sake!"

He pulled his hand away from hers and went out hastily. She heard the house-door slammed and hurried footsteps on the garden path; then everything was still, and she leaned back on her pillows, panting for breath. Jack's sudden break-down had set her heart throbbing with affright; it was so unlike him.

He, for his part, lay face downwards on the grass under the laburnum tree. At last he gathered himself up, tramped to and fro in the garden for a while, and came in at the verandah door with his everyday face.

"Mother," he said, "I'm going to tie up the jasmine; and I asked Eliza to make some tea and help you get to bed. You mustn't overtire yourself."

The next day he called on Professor

Brooks, and heard the details of the sentence with an unmoved face. She might live a year, or even more, the professor said, or perhaps only a few months; one could not tell much beforehand with internal cancer. He was not inclined to advise an operation; it might prolong her life a little, but only for a few months at the most; and the other way would be more merciful. "If she were my mother," he added gently, "I should not wish an operation."

There was no tremor in Jack's voice. "Then you think she will suffer very much?" he asked. The professor hesitated.

"It depends . . . Perhaps not so much as in many cases, if it goes quickly; but cancer is always cancer, and it may . . ."

He stopped, with a sense of wonder at the stolid face. "Is that callousness," he asked himself, "or self-control?" Then he saw the little sweat beads break out on Jack's forehead, and thought: "Poor lad!"

The next week brought Theo, like embodied sunshine; a creature ignorant of death and grief. Helen had written to him

at Paris, telling him that she had been ill and was "not quite strong enough to get about"; so he was prepared to be met at the station by Jack only, and to find her on the sofa when they reached the house. He came in with his unshadowed face, his violin, his aureole of yellow curls; and knelt down to hug and kiss her rapturously and to litter the sofa with the presents he had brought.

"Why, mummy, what do you mean by falling ill the minute we go away? Is it to provide Jack with an opportunity to try his hand at doctoring? That's carrying maternal devotion a bit too far. And to grow so thin, too! You must hurry up and get well before the bright weather goes; we want to take you boating, you know. Wait, I've got something outside that 'll make you well to look at."

He ran out into the passage, then came back with a huge sheaf of white Annunciation lilies filling both arms, and heaped them all over the sofa.

"Did you ever see such glorious ones? I stopped at Havre on the way, and the peas-

ants were bringing them in to market for the Madonna's images in church, so I got a barrowful for my special Madonna."

"And carried that load all the way from Havre? And the violin too?"

"Well, mummy, people carry lilies and musical instruments in heaven, don't they? And the water was like heaven to-day, with white sea-birds instead of seraphim, and shiny fishes wriggling and jumping for sheer delight, like the souls of the good people after they die. Why, Jack, how seedy you look! Too much dissecting, is it?"

Jack was standing still, looking out into the blossoming garden, and wondering how much more of this a man could bear. He turned with his wooden face.

"Oh, I'm all right, thanks. Don't you think the lilies should go in water?"

"Yes; they'll want a big bath-tub, won't they? Mummy, you look sweeter than ever; you ought always to be half buried in lilies."

As he stooped to lift them Helen caught his arm and drew him down beside her, resting her cheek against his.

“Kochanku mój!” Her eyes shone with a light which only Theo’s presence waked in them; her voice had a deeper tone in her native speech. And Jack, the outsider, looked on without bitterness or jealousy, but with an aching heart. He had grown accustomed to this, years ago; yet the pain of it was always new. It was a thing inevitable, that must be accepted and endured in silence. To the end his uttermost devotion would be a lesser joy to her than the touch of this bright creature’s wings; yet he was loved as much as any one could ever be who was not Theo and not of Polish blood. “She sees Poland in him,” he thought once more; “and he cares as much for Poland as I for El Dorado.”

Theo ran off laughing, his arms full of lilies, and the black kitten, dusted from ear to tail with golden pollen, purring on his shoulder. The door closed behind him, and the light faded out of Helen’s eyes.

“Jack, how can we ever tell him? It is sacrilege to throw a cloud on him; he is Baldur the Beautiful.”

Jack was stooping to smooth her pillow and gather up the fallen lily petals. He spoke with his face turned away.

"You had better let me tell him, mother; may be less of a shock to him that way, and Professor Brooks wants you kept quiet."

There was a kind of struggle in her face.

"No, dear!" she said at last. "We will neither of us tell him. Let him have this summer without a cloud. Remember, he comes out next autumn, and it might shake his nerves and spoil his playing; and the first concerts mean so much. There's no reason why he should know; I . . . I don't have the pain very often yet; and he goes back to Germany in September; he won't find out before then . . ."

Jack stooped down and kissed her gravely. "As you like, mother. It shall be our secret, yours and mine."

CHAPTER X.

So the holiday-time passed, and Theo suspected nothing. His mother's weakness and inability to take the pleasure trips he had planned for her were a sore disappointment to him ; his sweet and sunny nature could not care for enjoyment which might not be shared with others, and he had religiously saved up his few superfluous coins "to take mother about in the summer." Not being able to do this, he spent his money on hot-house grapes and peaches for her, and his time in ransacking the district for flowers and shells, making a sea-water aquarium to amuse her, or sitting at the piano in the dark, improvising soft fantasies while she lay listening with Jack's hand clasped in hers. "This is the water lapping against a boat, mummy," he would say ; "next year you'll come out and hear the real thing instead of my imitations."

"I think I like your imitations best, dear,"

she would answer cheerfully, and hold Jack's hand a little tighter.

For them it was a hard summer; at times, indeed, so hard that Jack's courage would have failed him but for the indomitable patience of hers. The disease had not yet reached its most painful stage; but there were already many long, sleepless nights, when Jack would sit with her, reading aloud or, if she was too ill for that, watching beside her silently. Often she entreated him to leave her and go back to bed. "I shall be quite comfortable," she would say, secretly dreading the lonely horror of the night, yet fearing lest the want of sleep should injure his health.

"Let me have all I can of you, mother," he would answer softly; and she would submit with a little sigh of relief.

Day would come at last, and with it Theo, light-footed and radiant, carrying dewy trails of honeysuckle to wreath the foot of her bed. "Have you had a good night, mummy?" Sometimes he would notice Jack's haggard face. "You work too hard, old fellow," he would say. Once he came up behind him in

the garden and slipped a hand through his arm; a wonderful hand, strong and slender, with the live finger-tips of the musician. "Jack," he said, "I've been worrying about you. I believe you have some trouble."

Jack paused a moment, then looked up with his grave smile. "A love trouble, do you think? My dear boy, I'm just an ordinary cart-horse; I can't get out of my harness to fall in love like you artists. By the way, what's become of the girl you wrote that song for last summer?"

Theo's tendency to fall in love was a standing joke in the household. A less adoring mother than Helen might have grown a little impatient of his raptures over now one girl and now another whom he had sat beside at a concert or seen passing in the street. He would find resemblances to the Libyan sybil, or the Madonna delle Pie, or Our Lady of the Rocks, where Jack with his slower imagination could see only a woman like any other woman. Once, rambling round the coast, they passed a fisherman's bare-footed daughter, sitting on a low rock at the water's edge, mending her

father's nets ; her wind-roughened hair hanging on her shoulders, a red sunset behind her and wet sands gleaming all around. For a week Theo was restless and miserable ; he would tramp in pouring rain over windy cliffs to the village where she lived, and come back in the evening, wet to the skin, and pallid with weariness and disappointment because he had not seen her. Then came Sunday, and he saw her going to church in her best clothes, shiny boots cramping her feet and the thick hair dragged up under a horrible monstrosity of a hat, nodding and wagging with huge magenta roses. He came home, with a tragic face, but cured. Nothing remained of his passion for the bare-legged unknown girl but an exquisite little violin romance, which he called : "The Fishing-Nets."

The holidays over, he went back to Germany. Helen had persisted in keeping the truth from him. "But, mother," Jack said at last ; "he must know some time. Don't let it come with a shock at the end. And . . . Germany is such a long way off."

"There's still time ; let him have his first

concerts in peace. We can send for him w **he**
 I get worse. And when he does come, d **ear**
 you must keep the bad sights from him. I
 . . . have seen a person dying of can **cer**,
 and I don't want Theo . . . "

"Mother!" Jack broke in, "that is **not**
 fair. He is a human creature, and you **have**
 no right to rob him of a human inheritance.
 You stand with a shield in front of him, and
 he will never learn to live."

"He will learn soon enough—afterwards."

"Afterwards . . . and you will go lonely
 this last winter . . . "

"Not lonely, dear, when I have you."

"Oh, yes, you have me, of course; but I'm
 not Theo. Mother, you have been sacrificed
 all your life; and now at the very end . . .
 It's wicked to carry unselfishness to that; **it's**
 not just."

"It would not be just for me to hamper **h i s**
 development. An artist is a high priest befo **r e**
 the Lord; he belongs to all men and to **n o**
 man. I have no right to take him from **h i s**
 music because I happen to be dying; that **i s**
 for mothers whose sons have no genius."

Jack stood looking on the floor, his teeth set. "Then thank God I have no genius!" he said at last. She drew him down to her and kissed his forehead.

"Even I may thank God for that."

When Theo had gone, Jack brought her up to London, and took lodgings near Kew Gardens, for himself and her. The daily journey to and from town was a heavy addition to the fatigue of his life, but it gave Helen fresh air to breathe and trees to look at, and enabled him to be with her for the few months left to them.

That winter he failed in his examination; it was the only occasion in his student life when this happened.

Before the questioning began he knew that he was going to fail; he had passed a terrible night at Helen's bedside, and his head ached and throbbed so that the floor seemed heaving beneath him. Taking his place, he looked round at his fellow-students. Some were nervously excited, some depressed; a few quite composed and business-like. He watched them, for a moment, with a kind of vague

curiosity ; they seemed to him so far away, so anxious over matters of no moment. Nothing was of any consequence, really, except the hopeless things. Cancer, for instance ; perhaps they would be asked about that ; the examiners putting questions and the students answering them would think they knew something about it, as if a man could know anything about cancer till the person he loves best is dying of it. Then he knows, the only thing there is to know : that there is nothing, nothing, nothing he can do.

He shut his eyes ; the horror of last night came over him, stifling, intolerable. "Oh, this is no use !" he thought ; "I'm good for nothing to-day ; I'd better go." Then he pulled himself together and plunged stolidly into the task set him.

At the end of the day one of the examiners came up to him with friendly concern. "You're not looking yourself to-day, Raymond ; I'm afraid you don't feel quite up to the mark."

"No, not quite," Jack answered. "I was a fool to come. I have failed, of course?"

"I . . . fear so. You look as if you ought to be in bed. What's wrong?"

"Oh, nothing much, thank you."

Two or three days afterwards the same examiner saw him in the street and crossed over to speak to him.

"Raymond, Professor Brooks dined with me yesterday, and talked about you. Why didn't you tell us you'd been up all night with a cancer patient? You were not fit to go in for the examination. I'm very sorry about it; he tells me you've been having a terribly hard time."

Jack's eyes flashed.

"Yes; and so has the woman that washes the dissecting-room floor. She lost her baby last week, and I found her crying on the stairs over her bread and cheese. But she didn't shirk her scrubbing; people's private troubles have got nothing to do with their work."

The examiner looked at him, puzzled. "I'm very sorry," he said again gently. "Your mother, isn't it? Have you plenty of friends in London?"

"Thank you; Professor Brooks has been

very kind ; so has the doctor who attends her. As for friends, there's nothing any one can do."

"Well, if there should be, will you let me know? And as for the examination, don't worry about that; you'll pass it next year. You have the makings of a good doctor."

Theo, meanwhile, had taken Berlin, Paris, and Vienna by storm. The enthusiasm aroused by his playing might have turned a wiser head; but his nature was singularly free from petty vanity and self-conceit, and the effect which success produced on him was not what might have been expected in the case of an impressionable lad of eighteen suddenly springing from obscurity to fame. For the first month or two it amused him; he sent home delicious pen and ink caricatures of himself as "the last new Mumbo Jumbo" enthroned, with a lion's mane, still short and stubbly, sprouting behind long, asinine ears; or as a gawky country bumpkin, grinning through a violin bow for the delectation of spectacled musical critics and fearsome society dowagers.

Very soon the favours of the public began to disgust him. "The people stare at me," he wrote, "as if I were a gorilla in a cage; and clap when I come on, till I feel inclined to say: 'Here we are!' like a circus clown, and turn a back somersault off the platform. It's utterly hopeless to try to play decently; how can you get anywhere near to your music with an audience that is only thinking about which leg you stand on and how you part your hair? And I *hate* the women! They click their fans all through the concert out of time; and afterwards they come up to you in low-necked frocks and tight stays; and talk about their souls, with just yards of satin and velvet kicking about the floor under your feet that you'd give your best G string to be able to pick up and hide their shoulders with. I *know* they ill-treat their servants."

The next letter contained a cheque, and a figure dancing on one leg for joy. "Darling mummy," the hurried pencil scrawl began: "here are grapes and carriage drives to go on with. Hauptmann" (the impresario) "has stumped up some money, and there'll be plenty

more soon. Hurry, hurry, *hurry* and get well, and wear the lace I'm sending by this post. You're never to scrimp and save and go without things any more; and old Jack Sober-sides can buy all the skeletons he wants."

"Mother," Jack said, as he laid the letter down, "it is cruel to keep him in the dark any longer."

Slow tears gathered under her closed eyelids; even the exertion of reading a letter was too much for her now, and her voice was tremulous with utter weariness.

"You may tell him if you like, dear; it can't injure his success now." She broke off, then added nervously: "And . . . Jack . . ."

"Yes, mother?"

"You'll be sure and tell him it's . . . not such a bad case. You know the word 'cancer' always gives people such a shock; and of course it might easily be worse. And then the morphia is a great help . . ."

"Yes, I'll tell him."

He wrote, asking Theo to come home as soon as his concert engagements permitted, and telling him, not the whole truth, but

enough to prepare him for hearing the rest. A telegram came in answer ; Theo was on his way home, leaving the impresario to apologise to an excited Parisian audience.

When the truth was told him at last he bore it with more dignity and patience than Jack had expected to see. The shock seemed to have awakened in him some dormant strain of his mother's character. In her presence he never lost his self-control ; but Jack, coming into his room late at night, found him sitting by the window in a crouching posture, white and panic-stricken. He sprang up at the coming of the grave, protecting presence, and clung to Jack's hand like a scared child.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come ! I . . . was afraid."

Jack sat down with him on the edge of the bed, putting an arm round his shoulders to stop their nervous shivering. He could not understand ; to him, grief was a different thing from this ; but he had the large humility of the physician, and was content to watch and give what help he could, if need be, without understanding. Theo looked up after a

little while ; he was still white, but the shivering had stopped, and his teeth no longer knocked together when he spoke.

"You are good to me, old fellow," he said ; "and I'm keeping you up when you're so tired."

"That's all right ; I'm used to being up."

"Jack, are you never afraid, never ?"

"I don't understand. Afraid of what ?"

"Of death."

Jack's brow drew itself down into an ugly line.

"Well," he said slowly, "if one's going in for being afraid, there are worse things than death to be afraid of."

"I don't mean one's own death—that's nothing ; I mean . . ."

"Other people's? Yes, that is worse ; but one gets accustomed, in time."

"No, not quite that. I mean . . . the everlasting presence, the idea of it, always there, always waiting for everything you love — I . . . never thought of it till now ; it's like a pit dug under one's feet, saying : 'Tread over me if you dare.' It is as if we must go

through all our life and be afraid to love ; if the gods should see, they will take away the thing we love."

Jack sat still, thinking, the sad lines deep about his mouth.

"It doesn't matter," he said at last. "If nothing worse than death happens to the people that a fellow loves, he's lucky. It seems to me death makes a pretty poor show, considering all the bother people have over dying. Anyhow, what's the use of worrying your head about that? Look here, Theo; if you get the horrors, or the blues, or anything, don't sit alone this way; hold on tight to me and I'll pull you through somehow."

"Haven't you ever horrors and blues of your own without mine? And, besides, I can't hold on to you all my life."

"Why not? What else am I there for? I can't play the fiddle."

Theo rose with a sigh, stretching both arms above his head.

"You may thank the gods for that," he said, as he let them fall. "Did you know old Hauptmann has wired again? He wants me

back in Paris to-morrow night for the Beethoven concerto at the Châtelet."

"Yes, and you must go and play your best; it will disappoint mother if you don't. Now tumble into bed, and be asleep in five minutes; you must start early to get in to town for the boat train. I'll call you; I shall be up in any case, to look after mother."

Whether Theo's playing of the concerto next evening was up to his best level or no, it was good enough to satisfy both audience and impresario. He ground his teeth a little under the rain of applause that followed; his nerves were overstrung to the pitch that makes any sound appear a menace and any crowd a ravening beast. The excited audience, shouting, staring, clapping hands and waving programmes, horrified and sickened him; he shut his eyes despairingly.

"Bis! Bis!" they yelled at him. "Bis!"

His breath came in quick pants of distress; he was almost ready to clap both hands over his ears and shut out the sound. It struck upon him like a blow, like sacrilege; it was as if he must cry out to them: "Stop! Hush,

for shame! I can't play; my mother is dying."

He turned to leave the platform, but on the steps the impresario thrust the violin into his hands. He pushed it back.

"I can't . . . I'm tired . . . "

"Give them something—anything—quick! or we shall never be done to-night. It's the only way to stop them."

Theo took the instrument mechanically and returned to the platform. The roar of shouts and hand-clapping died down suddenly as he raised his bow. Then came silence, and he realised that he had nothing to play. He looked out over the sea of faces, blankly; his memory was a washed slate; not a note remained on it, not the name of a composer.

Yet he must play something; the people down there with the upturned faces were waiting, waiting; and he had nothing to give them. A thin mist spread between him and the glaring lights; there was a dim space at the further end of the hall, and he fixed his eyes upon it, trying to remember. A room seemed to grow out of the shadows; half-

darkened, wholly grief-stricken and cheerless; his mother, with her drawn face white upon the pillow, her wasted, piteous hands; and beside the bed a watching figure, silent, weary-eyed.

He began to play. As for the audience, he had forgotten it; he was playing, not for the concert-goers of Paris, but for Jack and Helen. When he ended there was silence; then thunderous applause burst out again. He shuddered as he went down the steps.

In the artist's room Conrad caught him by the arm. "Theo," he said hoarsely, "was that . . . your own?"

Theo looked round him desperately; the maddening sound of applause filled him with terror; there seemed no escape from its malignant pursuit.

"I . . . made it up as I went along. Was it . . . was it very bad? Uncle Conrad, stop them; make them let me alone! I . . ."

He was white and shivering. Conrad, too, was pale, but from another cause. He laid a solemn hand on the lad's shoulder.

"Render thanks to God," he said, "for His great gift of genius."

Theo burst suddenly into passionate sobs.

"And mother is dying . . . "

For the remainder of the winter he took no Continental engagements. The impresario argued, coaxed, and threatened in vain; then resigned himself with a shrug of the shoulders, and made arrangements for London concerts. These, fortunately, brought in enough money to keep the little household in comfort, and to surround Helen with small luxuries which did something to soften the hardness of a hard death.

Towards the end she partly lost the suppressed manner which she had worn, like a nun's grave-clothes, through all the years of her widowhood. Conrad, who came twice from Paris to see her, even recognised at moments the girl Helen whom he had known in his youth. Sometimes in the evening, holding Jack's hand as he sat by her low couch before the fire, while Theo lay full-length on the hearth rug and watched her with adoring eyes, she would tell the two lads fragmentary stories of her life in Arctic deserts, of her husband and his death there, of her tragic youth

and dreary middle age. But it was not often that she had strength to spare for anything but silent endurance. Her pain was borne with heroic cheerfulness; but it wore her out none the less surely for that.

It was only during this last winter that she recovered something of the gift of improvisation for which in her youth she had been remarkable. On the rare "good days" when she was neither suffering acutely nor faint and exhausted, she would slip unconsciously, while talking to Jack or Theo, into a rhapsodic form of expression, now in verse, now in prose, sometimes in an irregular rhythm like that of a chant.

The last time that she left her room was in the beginning of March. Between two periods of bad weather came a few cloudless spring days, and the earliest flowers burst into sudden bloom. In Kew Gardens the shady spaces under trees were gracious with the drooping heads of snowdrops, and broad grassy slopes flashed back the sunlight from royal chalices of yellow crocus flowers.

On the warmest afternoon Jack and Theo

id her upon her couch and carried her out to the Gardens, that she might see the coming of spring before she died.

They took her to a wide, open space where crocuses, white and gold and purple, bloomed by tens of thousands, their bright heads erect, their stems a silver forest in the grass. Jack sat on a bench beside her; Theo, as usual, flung himself full-length upon the ground, his clasped hands behind his head. Helen lay looking out across the crocus field; the stillness of her face made the two lads silent, as in the presence of death.

“Mother,” Jack said at last, “I’m afraid you ought to come in now.”

“One moment, dear; I shall not see this again. Look!” Her eyes turned back to the crocus flowers. “They are my people.”

Jack misunderstood her meaning; he lacked her gift of keen imagination.

“Do they grow wild in your home?” he asked, and turned his eyes away that he might not look upon the nakedness of this eternal, unhealed grief.

“Don’t you see?” Theo murmured from the grass. “They are an army.”

The sudden light leaped up in Helen’s eyes.

“An army for an instant and for ever; an army that recks not of victory or of defeat. Gain and loss are one to them; the doom of battle is upon them before they have seen the sunlight; they fail and die, and it afflicts them nothing, for they are warriors to all eternity; the very earth around their feet is thick with spears.”

The listeners held their breath as they heard; she was like a thing transfigured, full of light.

“See how weak and defenceless they are, how easily crushed under foot; and yet how erect and patient an army. There is not one that has cast away his colours as the roses do; not one that shrivels on the stalk in the shame of a withered heart. As each man’s time is come, he falls where he stood; and a new soldier fills his vacant place, never turning to look where the dead comrade lies. Then in a little while all is over, and the place where

y died has forgotten them. Rank weeds of summer hide the withered husks and the bittered within. But so surely as spring comes back when winter is over, so surely shall our soldiers rise up from the dead, and stand in armoured ranks for battle, the weapon ready to the hand and every man in his place."

Long silence followed; then she turned with a sigh.

"Let us go, children ; our spring is not yet come."

Jack was still silent as they carried her in, and his eyes were very sombre. Assuredly she would be justified of her belief ; seed time and harvest shall not fail. Yet what use, when the seed is so bitter, and all the harvest is death ?

CHAPTER XI.

AFTER Helen's death Jack spent two years studying in Paris. He then returned to London for a year's work in the hospitals, before going to Vienna, where he intended to finish his course of study. Helen's small legacy would have been enough, with his frugal habits, to cover his expenses till he could get a post in some hospital; but he took all opportunities to add to it by coaching, microscope work, and library research, and laid aside every spare shilling for Molly. He had at first hoped that she would come to live and study with him in Paris, but to all such suggestions she replied by cold letters saying that she "could not leave home." They still corresponded, but in a formal, set way, like strangers. Jack had sometimes tried to break down the barrier between them, but met with no response; her letters continued to arrive at stated times, always worded in the same con-

ventional manner, always stiff with the same hard reserve. Apparently she had been taught to look upon him as a reprobate whose kinship disgraced her. The thought was bitter to him ; but he accepted it, as he had accepted so many things.

One day, soon after his return from Paris, he received a letter, addressed in Molly's hand, but with a London post-mark. It was merely a curt announcement that she had come to town to attend the St. John's ambulance course and was now in Kensington, boarding with Aunt Sarah's town relatives, and that if he cared to call on Sunday afternoon he would find her in.

He went, of course, but with a desolate sense of the futility of things. This was the sister for whom he had been pinching and saving, working and planning all these years ; and he was going to call upon her ceremoniously, just as he had to call, now and then, on the wives of the professors. The only difference was that with his sister he was less sure of a welcome.

He found her in a terrible Early Victorian

drawing-room, a tall girl, grave and self-contained, surrounded by thin-lipped, censorious women, whose eyes inspected him with freezing curiosity as he entered. Her own were steadily fixed on the floor, and the thick lashes hid their expression ; but her mouth was set hard. He endured half an hour of small-talk, listening for the rare sound of Molly's voice. She uttered only the barest commonplaces, and few enough of them, leaving the conversation as much as possible to the ladies of the house ; but when she spoke the sound of her deep, resonant contralto, the lingering inflections of her sweet West-country speech, seemed to him, amid these arid wastes of shabby-gentle cockneydom, like a spring of water in a thirsty land. She wore a tuft of Cornish heather at her throat.

When he rose to go, she turned to the hostess.

"Mrs. Penning, I will walk through the park with my brother ; I shall be back in time for supper."

Mrs. Penning bit her lip. The Vicar, when entrusting his niece to her care, had warned

er that the brother, who lived in London and would be likely to call, was "not a suitable companion for a young girl." She had no intention of letting Molly walk alone with this black sheep of the family; and to send out a duenna this afternoon would interfere with arrangements already made. Really, it was very thoughtless of the girl.

"I am afraid I cannot leave the house to-day, my dear," she said; "but if you are particularly anxious to go out I am sure Mildred will not mind accompanying you. You must be back in half an hour, though, as she is going to evening service."

"Thank you," Molly answered; "but I need not trouble Mildred."

"My dear! I could not possibly let you walk home alone. It is not suitable for a young girl, especially a stranger to London to be alone."

Molly raised her eyes and looked at Jack. He interposed at once.

"I will see my sister home."

"Yes, of course," said Mrs. Penning nervously; "but I think . . . Molly had better

not go out while she is under my care, except with an older lady. Mr. Raymond is very particular, you know ; and I am sure he would not like her to be seen in the park alone with a gentleman . . . ”

“ Even with her brother ? ”

Molly turned suddenly, with shining, dangerous eyes.

“ No, especially with her brother. You are very kind, Mrs. Penning ; but my brother and I have some family matters to discuss, and we would rather be alone. Shall we go, Jack ? ”

They went out in silence, while Mrs. Penning stood amazed. On the doorstep Molly turned to her brother, her nostrils quivering.

“ Those women are spies,” she said.

He accepted the statement in grave silence, acquiescing, and they walked on without further speech.

“ Do you know what I came to London for ? ” she began at last, without turning her head.

“ I know nothing, Molly ; not even what sort of sister I have.”

I came to see you."

He turned, without comment, and looked her. Her face was hard and resentful.

"I don't know what sort of brother I have, either, and I thought it was time to find out. I have more curiosity than you, it seems."

His mouth set in a sudden line, and the girl, watching him from under level brows, saw that she had stung him. He paused an instant before answering.

"I am glad you came," he said.

Molly flashed another look at him. The quick, passionate dilation of the nostrils transformed her face again.

"Are you? I'm not sure I am. It depends on . . ."

She broke off; then plunged on recklessly:

"Such as you are, whatever you are, you're the only near relative I've got. Don't you think we might as well know something about each other at first hand, now we're both grown up, instead of taking things for granted through other people? Or do you think blood relationships are all rubbish?"

"No, I don't think that; and, Molly, I have taken nothing for granted."

"Nothing? Not when you refused an invitation to come and see me after—how long was it? Seven—eight years?"

"It was an invitation to uncle's house. As for seeing you, I had waited so long for that that I could have patience a little longer till you could come to me, rather than . . ."

After a little pause he added slowly:

"I couldn't go into his house. If ever we get to know each other well, you'll understand why; but I can't explain."

"Jack!" she burst out suddenly; "what was it between you and uncle? No, don't tell me if you don't want to. I had no right to ask; it's not my business. But one hears bits and scraps of things . . . all sorts of things . . ."

"You have every right to ask," he answered gravely. "But I don't think I have any right to tell you."

"Do you think that's fair to me?"

"No, but then it's not a fair position all round. I think while you are accepting any-

ing from uncle he has a right to ask that enemies should not tell you things against me. Don't you?"

"Does that mean that you are his enemy? In the real sense of the word? Have you nothing to tell me but things against him?"

"Nothing."

"And nothing about Aunt Sarah? Are you her enemy too?"

He paused a moment.

"I have nothing to say about her, one way or the other."

"Jack, whatever the thing was that happened, it's more than ten years ago; and she lies awake at night and cries about you still. Last winter, when she had pleurisy, and we thought she was going to die, she clung to me and kept on repeating that she had 'done her best' for you. What wrong has she done you? I don't believe Aunt Sarah ever harmed a fly in her life. Granted, you may have something against uncle; but why should you hate her?"

He put the subject aside.

"I don't hate her."

"You despise her then," the girl broke in quickly.

"That I can't help. She's lukewarm, like the angel of Laodicea; I would she were hot or cold."

Passionate tears glittered in Molly's eyes.

"You will make me hate you!" she said, in her suppressed, vehement way. "An old woman, as broken down and feeble as she is; and you will let her go on worrying and fretting over some dead-and-gone quarrel of your schoolboy days . . . She asked me the other day to forgive her if she'd made mistakes in bringing me up. To forgive her, the only person in the world that ever cared for me! She's got it into her head that you were made what she calls 'wicked' by being unhappy at home, and that it was somehow her fault. Were you so unhappy, Jack?"

"Unhappy!" He repeated the word with a quick throb in his voice that made the girl start and look round at him. "Look here, Molly," he went on with evident effort, "what's the use of raking up all this? I've nothing against Aunt Sarah, except that she

was a coward and passed by on the other side. Anyhow, if she's been kind to you, I'm grateful to her for that, and she needn't worry about the rest. As for uncle, I haven't anything to say except what's better unsaid. If you want to know why I couldn't come to the house—well, I tried to kill him once, and that's reason enough."

"I asked him about it one day, and he told me you . . . "

"Don't!" he interrupted. "I don't want to hear anything from you, or to tell you anything. Don't get your impressions of him from me—they wouldn't be just. And judge of me by what you see yourself, not by what any one has told you; if I'm a bad lot you'll soon find it out without any telling."

She turned to him with a smile. There was a peculiar charm in this sudden softening of the stern, untried face.

"No one told me you were bad; and if they did, I shouldn't believe it at second hand. I do think you have a long memory; but that's a family failing. There are some things I remember . . . "

She broke off.

"Tiddles?" he asked.

Her face lit up suddenly, wonderfully.
"How did you know?"

Then they both laughed, and in the silence that followed their kinship was real to them for the first time.

"He is a most unhappy man," she said, looking out across the green space with sombre, thoughtful eyes. "He has spent his life in trying to shape the souls of his fellow creatures; and there's not one living thing that loves or respects him."

"Except Aunt Sarah . . ."

"Her life has been spent in keeping up a fiction. She's getting old now, and it's wearing thin; and she's scared at the truth underneath it, and miserable."

"The truth?"

"That she despises him in her heart."

"Was that why you couldn't come to Paris?" he asked abruptly.

She slipped her arm through his. "You're good at understanding. I couldn't leave her; you don't know what a desolate house it is."

They go through life avoiding each other's eyes; they are like people haunted by a ghost. Uncle keeps up an elaborate pretence of having forgotten that you ever existed, and she pretends he's not pretending."

"And you?"

"I pretend not to see. And the neighbours pretend there was never any old scandal about you. We all pretend."

"Molly, don't you see how all that will end? Some day you'll come to a split with uncle, a deadly split. That's inevitable, because you're a live human creature."

"Possibly; but it won't be in her lifetime."

"She's not so old; she may live another thirty years. And what do you suppose she'd do then?"

"Whatever he told her to do."

"And if he told her to turn you out?"

"She'd do it, of course. But it would kill her. And it won't happen. Remember, I'm just all she's got in the world, even if she is lukewarm. And he knows that; he's grateful

to me for sticking to her. Poor thing, she can't help it if she was born that way; I don't suppose the man in Laodicea could. Why didn't the Lord give him more courage, instead of abusing him for being a coward?"

He laughed softly. "At least no one will accuse you of being 'born that way,' my dear."

They walked back like old friends, talking of his plans for future work. Since Helen died he had not spoken so confidentially to any one.

For the next month London wore a sunny face to Jack. He relaxed the grind of his work a little, and spent happy afternoons wandering about Westminster Abbey and the National Gallery with Molly. Sometime, however, they would find themselves saddled with Mildred Penning, and all their pleasures froze to death under hard, inquisitive, disapproving eyes. It was in order to escape from her that Molly one day proposed spending the next Saturday afternoon at Jack's lodgings. After a short and stormy scene with Mrs. Penning, the brother and sister climbed

on to the roof of an omnibus together, unchaperoned.

"I suppose she'll write to uncle and complain of you?" said Jack. She shrugged her shoulders.

"I dare say. I've given up a good deal for uncle; but I'm not going to give up my only brother for him, and the sooner he understands that the better. He'll be angry for a bit, and then give in. He always does when he sees I really mean a thing."

Jack's heart beat quicker as he took out his latch-key. The thing that he had longed for, toiled for, waited for, the close, intimate sister-love, had become an actual possibility at last. If only for one afternoon he would have her alone with him, by his fire, a vivid presence in his life.

"Come in, Molly; I've only a bed-sitting-room, you know. Oh, Mrs. Smith has made a fire! That was thoughtful of her."

Then he drew back suddenly and stood on the threshold, staring blankly into the room.

Theo was stretched at full-length on the hearth rug, watching the dance of shadows on

the fire-lit ceiling. The hot glow of the red coals shone on his head; on the slim, strong hands with their blunted finger-tips; on the characteristic, irregular lines of chin and brow. He seemed to bask in the heat like a sunned snake.

“Hullo, Jack!”

Even in the first moment of surprise Jack was conscious once more of the musician's splendid indolence of posture and freedom of movement. Theo never needed to scramble to his feet; getting up, after lying flat on the floor, he seemed merely to change one appropriate and graceful attitude for another.

“My sister,” said Jack. “Theodore Mirski.”

His own voice sounded dull and harsh in his ears. He had already seen the stiffening and hardening of Molly's face; the instant reserve in which she had enwrapped herself; and his heart was as lead within him.

“I thought you were in Vienna,” he said.

“Joachim can't come, and they telegraphed, asking me to play instead of him at St. James's Hall to-morrow. I was glad enough of the chance to see you. Why, Jack, I never

saw you look so well, or so sulky. Don't you want me? You can turn me out, Miss Raymond, if I'm in the way."

"I'm afraid it's I that am in the way," said Molly. Her voice fell like a little icicle into their midst, chilling even Theo. He muttered some polite commonplace with a startled glance at her; and they sat down, decorously stiff and depressed.

Jack did his conscientious best to smooth away the queer awkwardness between his visitors. But, looking from Molly to Theo and back again to Molly, he realised how hopeless it was. These two, between whom lay all his personal life, appeared incompatibility personified; the artist, half angel, half baby, to whom he must be never-failing mother and devotee, guardian and slave; and the unformed, intolerant, passionate little Puritan girl who held him at arm's length, and for whose sake he would have died. He was as chained to both of them, and it seemed to him that their mutual repulsion must tear him piecemeal.

The miserable effort at small-talk failed at

last, hopelessly, and Jack looked up from the red coals with a desperate feeling that something must be done to end the silence before it became unbearable. Theo's face was curiously agitated; Molly's, inscrutable and grave. He looked round the room, and the violin-case, lying on the sofa, caught his eyes.

"Theo," he said, "I wish you'd play. My sister has never heard you."

The musician rose at once, and fetched his instrument. He seemed to find the suggestion a relief.

"What do you want?" he asked, curling himself down on the hearth rug with the violin against his neck. "Folk-songs? They don't want accompaniments."

"Slavonic ones, if you will. Did you ever hear a Polish folk-song, Molly?"

"You know I've never heard anything."

She leaned back, drawing the fire-screen forwards; her brow a little contracted, her eyes grave and wide in a shadowed, listening face, while the folk-songs trailed their low sound through the half-darkened room like disembodied ghosts of music buried long ago.

“Jack,” said Theo, laying the violin down on his knee, “do you remember a fancy mother had just before she died, about the crocus-flowers in the grass? Well, I . . . I’ve been seeing that in my head lately, and it’s coming into tune. I think it’s going to be for orchestra, I’m not sure yet; but I must play you some bits. Miss Raymond, did you ever look at a crocus,—I mean, really look at it?”

“Yes,” she answered from the shadow of the screen. “But not often. You can look at a dicotyledonous flower every day, and be the happier for it; but I’m afraid of the spear-leaved things that grow in threes; they’re like the angel with the flaming sword, and all my gates are shut.”

Her brother glanced round at her in wonder; it was as if Helen had spoken. She had turned her head now, so that the fire-light shone on her face. She and Theo were looking at each other silently, with a long look, troubled, searching, and unsatisfied; the look of those who see into deep chasms and who are afraid.

Theo began to play; very softly, his eyes still on the girl's face. After a while he drifted unconsciously into improvisation, pausing now and then with lifted bow and filling in the spaces with low, rhythmic speech. The violin, with its faint wailing, its dim, inadequate murmur; the flicker of the fire; the shabby, dingy, lodging-house room; all lost their separate characters, merged into a common background of dreams. To listeners and artist alike, the glittering spears of visionary warriors, the sight and sound of a great army marching, were an actual presence, living and immense.

Silence followed, and Theo sat with bent head, trembling a little, the violin still in his hand. Molly was again in shadow, motionless as if asleep with open eyes. It was Jack who spoke first, rising to light the lamp.

"Old man," he said, "there's one thing you might try to remember now and then."

"Yes?" Theo murmured vaguely. He had still not come back to earth.

"Only that ordinary mortals are your fellow creatures, after all, and can sometimes

when you guide their eyes, even though
y're not crowned kings by right divine."

Molly made a sudden passionate movement,
though he had hurt her. Theo started up,
sort of horror in his face.

"'Kings by . . .' Jack, how can you!
st because I can see things in my head!
o you think I wouldn't give it all—fiddle
d everything—to do things and be things
e you? What's nearer to being king by
ht divine—to see God's warrior flowers, or
be as they are? What am I but a fiddle?"

He turned away, his voice quivering with
ter discouragement, as with suppressed
ars. Molly raised her head slowly and
oked at her brother. His face was solemn,
en to sternness; but the next instant he
ght sight of his own image in the looking-
ss, and burst out laughing, like a schoolboy
zed by a humorous idea. It struck upon
with a sudden sense of tragedy, that she
l never heard him laugh that way when
y were children.

'What do you think of that, Moll, for an
ist's imagination? I look like a crocus,

don't I, with this mug! Theo, put the kettle on, my son; it's tea-time; and don't be an unmitigated ass, if you can help it. Why, what's become of the butter? And there are no biscuits either. Have you eaten them all?"

He was rummaging in the cupboard.

"Not quite all. The landlady's cat had some. We held a feast here while I waited for you. It was the cat that strewed crumbs all over the floor; I was too hungry to waste them that way; I've had nothing to eat since breakfast in Paris this morning."

"Why didn't you get lunch on the boat?"

"I had no money; only my cab-fare and two-pence over. I wanted to ask the waiter for a penny roll, but he looked so superior."

Jack turned round with an accusing face.

"What did you do with Hauptmann's last cheque?"

"Oh, I . . . don't know."

"I do," said Jack grimly. "Next time a deserving applicant comes to you with a pathetic story, hand him over to me, and I'll see he leaves you a little to go on with. You

mean well, Theo, but you're a born fool, and oughtn't to be trusted with a cheque-book. There, sit still, and I'll get you something to eat. You'll have to put up here for to-night; and wire to Hauptmann for more money to-morrow."

He went out, leaving Theo and Molly silent by the fire. The deadly embarrassment of an hour ago had taken hold upon them again.

"You know my brother better than I do," she said suddenly, looking up with serious eyes. "I didn't understand what you meant just now."

He smiled; then grew suddenly grave.

"And I can't explain, though you'll realise it yourself when you know him better. I think what I meant is that he's so . . . unconscious."

"Unconscious?"

"Yes; like a thing that works by the laws of its own nature, not by anybody's ethical codes. Don't you see? For instance . . . well, take justice; in him it's not a virtue to be cultivated; it's what music is to me, an.

inborn passion eternally unsatisfied. That's why he seems to me the saddest phenomenon I know. He'll go on wanting justice all his life, and there's no such thing to be had."

He hesitated for a moment, looking away from her ; then asked under his breath :

"And all your gates are shut?"

She rose, putting her hands up as if to stop him ; then let them fall again and turned away, with a broad and mournful recklessness.

"Yes, all ; and there is no one that has the key."

She crossed to the window, and stood with her back to him, looking out. Jack, coming in with his paper packages, found her so, and sighed under his breath as he put the eggs on to boil. He had come so near to having a sister ; and now Theo had scared her in the moment of her shy unfolding, and she had shrunk again into her shell, like any snail. She would go back to Porthcarrick a stranger, as she had come ; and he would lose the friend he needed, because of the friend who needed him.

CHAPTER XII.

DURING the months which he spent in Anna, Jack heard almost nothing of his sister. He had parted from her at Paddington Station with a lingering hope that the friendship born during her visit to London would live and grow ; but from the moment of her return to Porthcarrick she had slipped back into the old, stiff relationship. Her letters, rare and short, seemed to have been written by a school-girl, with the governess looking over her shoulder. After some time they stopped altogether.

The bitterness of his disappointment was the keener for the short bright month of mutual confidence. He had seen enough of a girl's inner self to have no doubt that she was wasting fine powers in the cramped Porthcarrick life, and that she herself was conscious of its narrowness, its petty, jarring hypocrisy. The look on her face was alone

enough to show that she was restless and unhappy; and he had more evidence than that. Perhaps, but for Theo, he might have been able to help her, to win her away from the stultifying influences of the Vicarage, or at least to support her in her unequal struggle for a little personal freedom, for a wider, more useful, more self-respecting life. But poor Theo, the gentlest, sunniest-natured thing alive, had innocently ruined all. He seemed to have aroused in her some shrinking, fierce antipathy; Theo, who made friends with every stray dog in the street; who surely had never before, in all his careless, beautiful life, been disliked by anything that breathed.

When Jack left Vienna he went to Edinburgh to take his degree. This accomplished, creditably, but without special honours, he returned to London and applied for hospital work, which he at once obtained. There was, indeed, not much fear of his lacking employment; several professors who had known him as a student had promised to recommend him in case of his applying for a vacancy. He was offered the choice of two

posts, and chose the one with the smaller salary, as it gave him better opportunities for study, and had the further advantage of being non-resident.

He settled down in shabby Bloomsbury lodgings, and worked like a cart-horse, trying to fill up every moment with vehement effort or deadening fatigue, that he might not feel the dread and blankness of his isolation. He was as one who enters from black passages into a lighted room, and shuts the door in haste because of the outer darkness whose ragged fringes would trail in behind him. Helen had saved him from the domination of fear ; and in her healing presence he had forgotten to be accurst ; but now that she had left him alone, the horror of his childhood stretched out chill finger-tips of memories and dreams to touch him unaware. While at work he was never afraid ; but he still dared not face leisure and loneliness together.

Lonely, indeed, he was exceedingly. Theo was on a concert tour in America, and from there was to go on to Australia and New

Zealand; he would be away a year. For that matter, had he been in London, his presence would have been small help to Jack. A kind of cloud had fallen upon their friendship; neither less affectionate nor less sincere than before, it had of late been disturbed and darkened, on Theo's side by a certain nervous irritability, on Jack's by a deep and melancholy sense, steadily growing within him, of his incapacity to understand a nature so different from his own. With Helen he had always been able to understand.

Early in March violent storms of wind and rain swept over London, with a sudden fall of temperature which caused much sickness and distress and, in consequence, very heavy work at the hospital. One evening, as Jack struggled home, late and weary, through a blinding downpour whose parallel slanting threads gleamed wickedly in the flickering lamp-light, he caught sight of a woman's figure clinging to an area railing, the cape of a drenched cloak flapping round head and shoulders. He crossed the street to offer

help against the savage wind ; but when he reached the opposite pavement the woman had turned a corner and disappeared.

He got home at last, changed his wet clothes, and sat down by a smoky fire to wait for dinner. Possibly because he was tired and cold, he found it to-night more difficult than usual to shake off the depression which always lay in wait to spring upon him whenever he was off his guard. He sat idle, a rare thing with him, and listened to the angry hissing of rain-drops falling down the chimney on to the hot coals.

“A woman has been here enquiring for you,” said the landlady, bringing in the tray.

“In this weather ? Who is it ?”

“She wouldn’t give her name ; said she’d call again. She’s been walking up and down the street waiting for you. She looks very bad.”

“A patient, walking up and down on such a night ! What was she like ?”

“I couldn’t see ; she was so muffled up, and drenched to the skin. She’s queer somehow,—all draggled and shivering and

splashed with mud, and her hair half tumbling down, and yet dressed like a lady. I should think she's a bit crazed."

"Or else in trouble. It must be something serious for her to . . ."

Some one knocked at the street door, evidently with a shaking hand.

"There she is," said the landlady. "Shall she come in, sir?"

"Of course."

The woman came in with a swishing sound of wet skirts dragging round her feet, and stopped short in the half-light near the door. The landlady, after one quick, suspicious glance, went away, shaking her head.

"I'm sorry I was out when you called," Jack began, rising.

He could not see what his visitor was like, for she had put up an arm before her eyes as though the lamp-light dazzled her; but he recognised the cloak which he had seen flapping by the area gate.

"You must be wet through," he said. "You wished to see me . . .?"

There he broke off and drew back a step.

The woman came towards him slowly, with a stumbling, swaying movement as though she were blindfolded. Little streams of water trickled from her skirt, from her cloak, from the tumbled mass of hair that had slipped down on to her shoulder. The hood of her cloak was drawn over her head; but as she dropped her arm he saw that the half-hidden face was white and wild and haggard, and that the brow was broad and very level.

“Molly!” he cried.

She pushed back her hood and stared at him vacantly. She made two or three efforts to speak before any sound came from her lips.

“Yes,” she said; “you were quite right.”

“Molly! How did you . . . ?”

“Uncle has turned me out of the house. You said he would. I came to you . . . I hadn’t anywhere else to go. Will you put me up for a night or two . . . till I can think . . . of something . . . make some . . . arrangement . . . I’m tired . . . sleepy . . . I can’t . . . see . . . ”

Her voice was sinking into an unintelligible murmur. He caught her by the arm.

"Sit down. You shall tell me about it afterwards. You must get off these wet things and . . ."

His touch seemed to rouse her; she shook her arm free.

"I won't sit down till you understand. How do I know you'll take me in? . . . I tell you, he has turned me out because . . ."

"Good God, child, what do I care why! Take this cloak off; one could wring a gallon of water out of it."

He was unbuttoning the cloak. She flung it off suddenly and stepped into the light.

"Look," she said.

He stood still, looking at her figure; a moment passed before the truth flashed on him. She turned away with a slow, grave gesture, and stooped to pick up the wet heap lying on the floor; but he snatched it out of her hand with a cry.

"Oh, my poor little girl . . . and at uncle's mercy!"

He caught her up in a sudden passion of

tenderness, and, laying her on the sofa, covered her hands with kisses. His vehement emotion roused no responding thrill in her; she only shivered faintly, passive in his arms. He came to his senses after a moment.

“How cold you are! You must get off all these things at once. Wait, I’ll lock the door and go into the bedroom while you change by the fire. I’ll fetch you some clean things; you’ll have to manage with underclothes of mine and the blankets. Let me get your boots off first; I must cut them, I think.”

When he had drawn the sofa to the fire and laid her on it, rolled up in the rug from his bed, he ran downstairs for hot-water bottles, boiling milk, and brandy. Coming back he found her in a kind of stupor, neither fainting nor asleep, but too much dazed with cold and fatigue to understand when spoken to. After some time a faint tinge of natural colour came back into her blue lips. She opened her eyes and looked at him gravely.

“Jack,” she said, “did you understand?”

He was sitting on the edge of the sofa, chafing her hands. He bent down and kissed first one and then the other.

“Yes, my darling.”

“And you . . . will take me in?”

He pushed the damp hair back from her forehead.

“Why, you little goose! Drink some hot milk and don’t talk nonsense.”

“No—no!” She drew herself away from him and sat up, her eyes glittering. “You want to be merciful, like Aunt Sarah. She tried to interfere yesterday—talked to uncle about the woman taken in adultery and the one sinner that repenteth . . . I’ve nothing to repent of: I’m not ashamed. You have to understand that before you take me in. My life is my own to keep or give away; and if I choose to ruin it and pay the cost . . . ”

“You shall tell me all that afterwards, dear. Theories will keep, and your supper won’t. Take this while it’s hot.”

She took the cup eagerly and tried to drink. Then, for the first time, she broke down. He knelt beside the sofa, holding her

close against him ; and it seemed to him that hours passed while she sobbed on his neck. When she had grown quiet at last, he forced a little food on her with gentle persistence.

“When did you last have anything to eat?”

“I . . . forget. Some time yesterday. They found out in the afternoon . . . I think ; or was it evening ? . . . Ah, yes ; it was dark. I tried to find some water in the night ; . . . it was so cold on the moor, and my throat burned . . . I suppose it was the gale . . . I found a rain-pool . . . but the water smelt of graves. Everything smelt of graves . . . and the sleet made me giddy . . . I fell so many times . . . That’s why my hands are cut about this way . . . ”

“Were you out on the moor all night?” He spoke in a suppressed voice, harsh and low.

“Yes . . . I . . . I got to Penrhyn in the morning and caught the early train . . . you know, the cheap one. I was lucky, wasn’t I? I shouldn’t have had money enough for the express.”

“Do you mean that he turned you out on to the moor alone, at night, in the storm, with no money?”

“It was because I wouldn’t answer his questions. Aunt Sarah gave me a few shillings that she had over from something. She cried so bitterly, poor thing. And I had half a sovereign. I was threepence short for the railway ticket, but I had some postage-stamps . . .”

“Where did you get that bruise on your forehead?” he interrupted. Her left temple was cut and swollen; the blow, an inch lower, might have killed her.

She hesitated a moment, then silently bared her right arm. It was stamped below the elbow with blue finger-marks.

“I . . . don’t think he meant it,” she said softly; and drew the sleeve down again.

“He struck you?” Jack asked in the same dead voice.

“He was trying to make me speak. I had refused to tell him . . . who the father is. He seemed to lose his senses bit by bit. He kept on repeating: ‘Who?’ and wrenching

my arm harder and harder. . . Then Aunt Sarah tried to stop him . . . and he knocked me down . . . ”

“There, that’s enough.”

She turned at the strange sound of her brother’s voice ; and looked at him. She had never seen before how he looked when he was angry ; and the sight chilled her into silence.

“You’d better not tell me any more about uncle,” he said presently, with his habitual quiet manner. “We came pretty near to killing each other once, you know ; and I have you to look after now. Suppose we make a compact not to mention him again. I think I must get your bed ready now, dear ; and to-morrow we’ll talk over our plans.”

“But where will you sleep if I take your room ?”

“Here, on the sofa, of course. We’ll fit in this way for a week or two, and then get other lodgings. As soon as you are well enough, you must see about some clothes.”

“But, Jack, I can’t stay here, on your hands. It’s all very well for one night, but I must find some work to-morrow.”

"Dearest, work is not so easy to find all at once; and you're not in a state to do it, if it were. Rest a few days and then we'll see."

"Oh, you don't understand! There are more than two months still . . . and when the time comes . . . Do you think they'll take me in at any hospital, Jack?"

He turned round, shaken with mortal fear.

"Molly, you're not going to leave me?"

"You wouldn't have me stay here and be a burden on you till the child is born? No, no; not for the world."

"Why not? Have they made you hate me so that you can't come to me when you want help?"

"You see, I came; I don't know why. I . . . thought, somehow, you wouldn't turn me away. If you had, I should have . . ."

"Do you think I have so many joys in life that I can afford to turn away the sunlight when it comes in at my door? Molly, Molly! I've had to live without you all these years. Now you're here, and your first thought is to go away again. I can't give you up. Stay till it's over, anyhow; if you

must go then, at least I shall have had you for a little while."

"You want me, really? For yourself? Not just out of pity? I don't want anybody's pity."

He laughed, and clasped her in his arms.

"Then you'll stay?"

"Wait a minute!" She pushed him back, and her face grew suddenly hard. "If I am to stay with you, you must promise me never to ask who the man is, never to ask any questions at all."

"Molly, I shan't look a gift-horse in the mouth! If ever he takes you from me, I shall know him then; and if not . . ."

"That will never happen. He has forgotten me."

His eyes darkened again.

"Forgotten? And left you to bear it alone . . ."

"Stop!" she cried with gleaming eyes. "I love him."

He bent his head, silenced, but raging inwardly.

"You shall not say a word against him; it

was my own choice. He wanted me, and I gave myself ; I never haggled or bargained or asked that he should marry me. He has had his joy, and I pay the cost of it. Why not, if I'm content? It was a free gift."

She stopped and put her hand up to the bruised temple.

"Oh, this pain in my head! I'm half blind . . . Listen, Jack ; if I am a coward at the end, and turn against him when I'm not my real self, you're to remember always that any thing I say will be a lie. I have nothing to complain of—nothing."

Suddenly her eyes filled with tears. She threw her arms round his neck.

"See what a brute I am! I come to you like a starving dog begging for shelter ; and when you take me in I do nothing but make conditions."

"My treasure, you shall make all the conditions you like if you'll only stay with me."

"Then let me make one more ; a fearful one."

She took both his hands ; her own were burning.

“Promise that if I die next May, and the child lives, you’ll adopt it, kill it,—any thing you will ; but save it from uncle somehow.”

He kissed her forehead solemnly. “There was no need to ask that promise.”

“It’s one that you probably won’t be called on to keep. There’s not . . . ”

She broke off ; then finished the sentence deliberately. “Not much hope of that. We’re frightfully strong, we Raymonds.”

“And frightfully lonely too, sometimes. Keep alive if you can, Molly.”

Her eyes were fixed upon him, wide and wistful.

“Are you so utterly alone ? I thought . . . you had some friends.”

“I have Theo. But Theo is . . . ”

He left the sentence unfinished, and stared absently into the fire. Presently he recovered himself with a start.

“Molly, darling, how you shiver ! What was I thinking of not to send you to bed at once !”

CHAPTER XIII.

"JACK," said Molly, coming into the meagre little front room, "I wish you'd put that microscope away for half an hour; you look fagged to death."

Jack raised his head from the specimens. He had been straining his eyes over them ever since he came in from the hospital. On Saturday afternoons the work was always heavy in the crowded out-patients' department; and to-day, in the thick November fog and the reek of gas and damp humanity and unwashed clothing, he had begun, strong as he was, to feel tired and sick.

"You have no business cutting sections till you've had some dinner," said Molly; "you'll only cut them too thick, and get a headache as well."

"Oh, I'm all right; only the out-patients are so unreasonable. They will all talk at once on these foggy days. The poor things

seem to get flurried, like the cart-horses, with slipping about in the mud. I came in splashed up to my hat."

Molly put her arm round his neck. They had been living together for nearly four years now, and had learned to read each other as only close friends can read. No one else would have seen from the line of his mouth that he was depressed as well as tired.

"Is it bad news?" she asked softly, with her cheek against his hair.

"No, nothing in particular. I'm an idiot to get down in the mouth now, just when I've got a good appointment at last, and this big stroke of luck with the Medical Congress."

"Perhaps that's why. I never used to worry over weekly accounts in the days when we couldn't get enough to eat, as I do now with three pounds a week for housekeeping."

"You needn't worry, old girl; the last shilling's worth of debt will be cleared off next month. You see our difficulties are all over now; even the private practice is beginning to flourish."

She kissed him, laughing.

“And that’s why you get the blues? You and I are contemptible frauds, Jack; our courage is only good for hard times; it all fizzles out at our fingers’ ends at the first bit of prosperity.”

“You’re right,” he answered gravely; “I’m not worth my salt. Two years ago, with the child ill and not a sixpence coming in, I shouldn’t have got fidgetted by a fog and a few little worries; I’m getting spoiled. It’s your fault, Moll; if you coddle me this way I shall end by growing fat and sensitive and ill-tempered, like a rich old patient with nothing to do but imagine troubles.”

“You’d better not, or I shall hand you over to Johnny to be suppressed. He’ll find you plenty to do.”

“Yes, and I’ve plenty to do as it is, and here I am fooling about and wasting time. It’s no use the Congress people inviting me to show sections if I haven’t got any ready to show. They ought all to be in Edinburgh by the 15th.”

Molly still kept her arm about his neck.

“Wait just a minute. You haven’t told me

what the 'few little worries' are? Hospital patients?"

"Oh, partly that; and then Theo . . ."

"You had a letter this morning?"

Her voice was quite under control, and as she leaned above him he could not see her eyes.

"Yes, I'm anxious about him. He's writing a set of Polish dances for stringed instruments, and he says the music takes on shapes and colours and dances round his bed all night. His handwriting is unsteady, too; you know what that sort of thing always means with him."

Molly was still looking out across her brother's head, with wide, grave eyes. He sighed, and added in his patient way:

"He doesn't say who the woman is this time, but I suppose there must be one; it seems to be the inevitable condition of his doing creative work. It's a bit difficult to understand how any one's affections can jump about that way."

There was a sudden little pause; then the girl said softly:

“ Still, there is this ; if a rainbow is not a permanent thing, it is at least a clean and beautiful one. An artist is a kind of glorious child ; his instinct protects him from sordid entanglements.”

“ That makes it all the worse,” Jack broke in gloomily. “ If he got into vulgar intrigues with society flirts, as ninety-nine per cent. of the successful musicians do . . . ”

“ He would never have written the ‘ Crocus Field ’ Symphony.”

“ No, that’s true ; his music would have got vulgar too. But at least no one would suffer. As it is—Molly, my heart aches for the women that have loved him. That little Austrian princess—the year that Johnny was born, you know ; I had a long talk with her. The poor child honestly believed he would be faithful to her, and the worst of it is that he believed it himself. I’ve no doubt she’s got over it now, and married as her father wished ; but do you think she’ll ever be the same creature again ? He has smashed her youth in pieces, and gone off to another toy.”

“ Just as Johnny would do if you gave him

a precious thing to play with. It is the privilege of babies and of gods and of all things defenceless and divine; they take our joys and break them, and we comfort ourselves with the broken pieces."

Her brother turned round suddenly, and took her in his arms. They were both silent for a little while.

"How you have softened, Molly, since the child came! Sometimes you remind me of Mother."

"Theo's mother?"

"Yes; or Christ's mother. She seemed to me like the Catholic idea of the Madonna: everybody's mother."

"So long as I am Johnny's mother—Jack, how could I be hard against any one now, when I have the child?"

She sat down by the fire, drawing towards her a basket of clothes to mend. Jack began to whistle over his specimens, and she to darn earnestly at a stocking; neither was in the mood for further speech.

"Mummy!" a small voice wailed from the back room; "my house has tumbled down."

Molly rose and opened the folding doors. The bricks lay scattered on the carpet, and forlorn among the ruins sat Johnny, round-eyed and on the verge of tears. His mother picked him up and carried him into the front room.

“Never mind, sonnie; we’ll build another house to-morrow. Come and play here till your tea is ready. You mustn’t shake the table, though; Jack’s cutting sections.”

Johnny wriggled out of her arms, and ran up to the table, his blue eyes inquisitive and shining. He had the face of a cherub and the habits of a despotic emperor.

“Uncle!” he said, stretching out a fat hand towards the microscope; “I want to see. Uncle!”

The word was a new one in his vocabulary, and he was proud of it. Susan, the maid, had just been explaining to him that little boys ought not to call their uncles: “Jack.”

Jack put up his left hand suddenly, and bit it. The next instant he remembered that even the gods have some mercy, and that his childhood was over.

"I want to see!" Johnny repeated imperiously. He was not accustomed to be kept waiting.

"Don't worry Jack, darling," said the mother; "he's busy."

"He doesn't worry me; I like to have him."

He stooped down and took the child on his knee.

"What is it you want to see, old man? There's nothing much to look at to-day."

"Can't you make the animals wiggle about?"

"Animals?"

"Infusoria, he means," Molly put in. "You showed him a drop of water the other day."

"Oh, those! No, chick, I've no pond water to-day, and we don't let animals wiggle about in the water from our tap."

"Why?"

"For fear they should wiggle about in your inside and give you a bad throat. There, you can get the high chair and sit beside me, only don't jerk my elbow. Oh, confound the screw!"

He was stooping, with knitted brows, to adjust the microscope. The king of the household looked on critically.

"You're twisting him wrong," he remarked in a severe voice.

"True for you, sonnie; and that little head in my light doesn't help me to twist it right."

"I think I hear Susan coming," Molly interposed. "And I think there are hot scones for tea. We'd better hurry up and get those grubby paws washed."

She opened the door, and Johnny, radiant at the prospect of scones, trotted away to Susan. Presently little squeals of delight were heard coming from the kitchen.

"Molly," said Jack, with his head down over the screws of the microscope, "don't let the child call me 'Uncle,' there's a good soul."

.

The diphtheria epidemic which was spreading through the south of England had reached Cornwall. In Porthcarrick and the neighbouring moorland hamlets child after child sickened and died. It had been a wet

and stormy autumn, a hard time for the fisher-folk. Many lives had been lost in the rough weather; and what little fish was dragged to market over sodden roads and howling moors brought in small return for the labour and peril it had cost. Poverty, grief, and weariness had lain heavily on the storm-beaten villages ever since the September gales; now, at Christmas-time, the sickness had come.

But for their Vicar, the Porthcarrick people would have been in evil case. Dr. Jenkins, middle-aged, overworked, handicapped by the incessant cares of a small income and a large family, did his best; but conscientious and kindly as he was, he could not have stood against the dead-weight of general misery without the support of the stronger nature. It was the Vicar who enrolled volunteer helpers and collected subscriptions; who tramped over the soaked heather from cottage to cottage, visiting the sick and bereaved, investigating cases of distress, and finding temporary homes, away from contagion, for the brothers and sisters of the

stricken children. In these black weeks he was on foot early and late ; quite white-haired now and a little slower in his movements than when Jack had known him, but otherwise hardly changed ; erect and uncompromising as of old.

As for Mrs. Raymond, she remained the dutiful wife that she had always been. She was too feeble, too heavy and asthmatic, to tramp the stony moors as her husband did, and for courage, she had none to help herself or others ; nor could she dare to mock the gods by offering consolation to any woman who had lost a child ; but what little one so poor in spirit had to give she gave submissively, without complaint. She turned her old black silk gown once more to make it last another year, and timidly slipped into the Vicar's hand the money she had saved up to buy a new one "for your coal and blanket fund, Josiah." Her mornings were spent in making soups and jellies for the sick ; her afternoons in sewing or knitting for them ; but it was the Vicar who had to distribute the gifts. In age as in youth, she hid behind her master

and asked his approval at every step; a patient Griselda, grown old in obedience, behind whose eyes still lurked the unlaidd ghost of fear.

The heart-breaking rain spent itself at last; and one morning, laying the cloth for lunch in the dreary, immaculate sitting-room, she saw an unfamiliar gleam of sunshine fall across the table.

Her first impulse was to lift up her heart in thanksgiving for a merciful answer to prayer: if dry weather should be granted at last, perhaps the sickness might abate. Her second was the result of lifelong habit: she spread a newspaper upon the floor to save the carpet.

The board of health officer from Truro came in with the Vicar for a hasty lunch; they were to attend a committee meeting, and then to make a round of visits together to places suspected of unsanitary conditions.

“I shall probably be out late,” the Vicar told his wife. “There has been another death near Zennor Cross, and I must go round there when we have finished.”

“Don’t kill yourself with work,” said the visitor. “What would Porthcarrick do?”

“It is the diphtheria we hope to kill,” Mr. Raymond answered bravely; “and we shall do it soon now, if the Almighty in His mercy should send us fair weather.”

The official nodded approvingly. He was an earnest worker himself and a lover of workers, and the Vicar’s indomitable energy delighted him. “What a splendid old fellow!” he had said to Dr. Jenkins. “As stiff as a cast-iron gate to look at; and just see the work he gets through!” He looked at the hard old face with genuine admiration.

“Talking of diphtheria,” he said, “reminds me. I wonder are you by any chance related to the Dr. Raymond in Bloomsbury who has been making experiments lately with the diphtheritic virus? I saw an article about it in this week’s *Lancet*; he’s to read a paper at the Edinburgh Congress. His theory seems to be attracting a good deal of attention.”

If he had turned to the woman her scared eyes would have silenced him; but he was

looking at Mr. Raymond, and the grey face never twitched.

“Yes, he is a relative.”

“Really? How small the world is, to be sure! I spent a week in the same boarding-house with Dr. Raymond last summer; I was taking a holiday on the south coast, and he was there with a sister of his, a young widow, I think, with a little boy—such a beautiful child!”

Then he became conscious of the strained immobility of his hosts, and stopped.

“He is a relative,” the Vicar repeated; “but not an acquaintance.”

The conversation flagged awkwardly for a few minutes; then the visitor looked at his watch.

“It’s time to go, I think.”

In the garden the Vicar stopped short.

“Pardon me,” he said to his guest; “I forgot a message for my wife. I will catch you up the road.”

He went back into the house. His wife was standing where they had left her, quite still, her eyes on the floor.

"Sarah," he began, and paused in the doorway.

She started, then recovered her self-possession, and came up to him.

"Did you forget any thing?"

He hesitated, looking away from her. "You perhaps feel lonely when I am out so much?"

"No, Josiah; I'm used to being alone."

"Yes." He paused again.

"I was wondering . . . whether you would like Dr. Jenkins's little girl to come and sit with you sometimes. She is a nice, quiet little thing, and you were always so fond of children . . . "

The words died in his throat as he saw her draw back from him, her hands outstretched, her eyes widened, full of dread.

"No, no! Josiah. Oh, don't bring a child in here!"

His face had turned to stone.

"You mean, Sarah . . . ?"

They stood still and looked at each other. He was brave enough, but not she. Her eyes sank; her old hand fluttered against the skirt of her gown.

“ I . . . I’m not so strong as I was ; . . . and children are so noisy . . . ”

He had not flinched. “ It is as you prefer,” he said, and went out.

She watched him from her window as he walked up the lane ; a black and sunless blot upon the landscape ; correct, professional, with stubborn shoulders still unbowed under the weight of grey hair and of shame. Then she sat down at her neat work-table to darn his socks.

The church clock struck the hour ; and, looking up, she saw the door of the board school open and a crowd of little girls coming out, laughing and chattering, their satchels swinging from their wrists. She put down her work.

“ My eyes seem failing lately,” she said aloud, as if in the empty room there had been still a listener, with whom she must keep up the decencies of old hypocrisy. “ They ache when I sew.” And she drew her hand across them furtively.

Then she rose and pulled her stiff, white curtain aside, very carefully, not to spoil its

starched perfection, and looked out at the children. They came running down the lane; some passed her window without looking up; others glanced over her, where she sat forlorn and old, much as she, in her time long ago had often glanced over Spotty.

She shrank away, as Spotty used to shrink when any one crossed the yard, and drew the curtain forward again. But she peeped between its frilled edge and the shutter to see the children. Strange children all, with cold, unfriendly eyes; but some of them had satin cheeks and wind-kissed freckles here and there; and all of them had nimble feet and voices full of laughter; and one (but she turned her head away when that one passed) had thick and tawny curls that caught the sunlight where some other woman's hand had brushed them back and tied them with a ribbon.

.

*"Johnny dangerously ill. Diphtheria.
Crying for you."*

Jack repeated the words to himself over and over again. The wheels of the train

hammered them out; the rattle of the windows, the breathing of his sleepy fellow-passengers, the heavy thumping of the thing that ached somewhere inside his chest or somewhere in the top of his head (he was not quite sure which) all worried and pursued him with their senseless iteration. Sometimes the refrain would break off for a moment and let him hear another one that was going on more softly underneath it, scarcely audible, but always going on: "*You'll come too late; you'll come too late; you'll come too late.*"

Surely that must be St. Albans, that blur of brown streets in the shadowy landscape as the train rushed past. He would soon be home now. But it was a long time since Molly's telegram had called him from his breakfast in Edinburgh and sent him tearing to the station for the first train back to London. Any thing might have happened since then. If only he had not gone to the medical Congress! If only . . .

He raised the window blind and looked out. It was growing dark already, but it

grows dark so early in winter. . . Patches of snow gleamed faintly here and there in the level pasture land.

Somehow he had never realised till to-day what the child was to him. Indeed, he had never had much time for thinking about his personal affections; there were always so many things to do, what with the hospital and the microscope work, and chance jobs of coaching students for examinations, to make both ends meet. One couldn't afford to neglect opportunities for earning a few odd pounds here and there, with three mouths to feed and Johnny's education to save up for. And when he did get free, he was tired, or worried about patients, or rushing across the Continent in express trains in response to wild telegrams from Theo. . .

Poor Theo ! The periodical tragedies with his duchesses and countesses had a trick of coming at such inconvenient times; and they were so real to him, while they lasted. Only a year ago he had tried to asphyxiate himself with charcoal fumes, together with the misunderstood and beautiful young wife of some

bald-headed ambassador. The farewell telegram had come when Jack was down with influenza, and he had dragged himself up out of bed and caught the mail for Brussels. (It was considerate of nature, by the way, to have made him as strong as a horse.) He had arrived just in time to open the windows, and to keep the scandal out of the papers, and administer first restoratives and then consolation and fatherly advice to the two grown-up children. They had probably forgotten each other's existence by now.

"You'll come too late. You'll come too late. . . "

It was a bit hard that it should be diphtheria, the very disease that he had toiled and laboured over, that had been the centre of his secret hopes for the last three years. He was nearly convinced now that he was on the track of a discovery; but what use are discoveries if they cannot save the child you love? What use is any thing if it comes too late?

He lowered the blind again and leaned back

in his corner with closed eyes. He had been tired when he left Edinburgh; and now his head throbbed like a steam-thresher. He must keep still for a few minutes and not listen to the burden of the wheels.

Ah, the staircase . . . and the door that creaked when his uncle pushed it open . . . and the room with the sloping ceiling . . . the two rafters . . . He started and opened his eyes. He had slipped back somehow to childhood, to the vicarage at Porthcarrick, to the room of horrors. It was some years now since he had last been troubled by that particular nightmare, the same which had haunted him after Helen died. He brushed one hand across his forehead; it was quite wet.

This was absurd; a man who has things to do can't afford to go in for nerves and fits of the horrors, as if he were Theo. If only the child would live . . .

“Tickets, please!”

As the door jerked open he sat up straight and realised dimly that he had been bargaining in his sleep with some unknown god;

promising to forget Porthcarrick, to wipe out the image of the gable room, if the child might but live.

.

His sister met him under the disinfectant sheet on the landing of the stairs. Her face wore a strangely passive look, as if she had been suddenly awakened, as if her eyes were still heavy with sleep.

“Molly,” he said, and paused; then again, in a whisper: “Molly . . . ?”

She leaned her head against his shoulder.

“You’re too late.”

.

They went into the room. It had already been put in order; a shaded lamp burned beside the cot where Johnny lay like a big wax doll, his yellow hair spread round him. A bunch of snowdrops had been placed in his right hand. Jack knelt down and stayed a long time motionless and silent. At last he uncovered his face and kissed the rigid baby hands. As he rose, the sleeve of his coat brushed against the lamp-shade and tilted it back. A band of yellow light fell across the

cot and lit up the profile of the little corpse. It was like Helen's.

Jack stood quite still beside the cot. The minutes dragged by heavily, and he stood looking. Something seemed to have dried up in him, and withered. One made so many mistakes in life, and when one found them out they mattered very little; indeed, nothing in the world mattered much.

Something moved on the other side of the cot. It was Molly; and as he looked up their eyes met. She put out her hands as if he had struck her.

"Ah, don't look so hard! He wanted to tell you; it was not his fault, it was mine!"

"It was mine," he answered wearily, and turned away. "I might have seen."

He crossed the room and leaned upon the mantle-piece, looking down into the fireless grate. Molly came up to him.

"I couldn't tell you, dear; it might have made you hate him. He has no one else in the world that will love him faithfully, only you and me; and me he has forgotten. If you were to desert him . . . "

She broke off. Jack had not moved, and his face was still hard. She slipped her arm about his neck, as Helen used to do.

“Remember, he is not quite a human being. It is not fair to blame him if he hurts us; he can't understand responsibilities, any more than an angel might, or a sky-lark. It's not his fault that he has genius. And if I bore a child to him, he bore one to me; his first symphony. Anyhow, if there ever was any thing to forgive, I forgave it long ago. Some one must pay for the music.”

He shook his head with a hopeless gesture.

“You don't understand. It wasn't of you I was thinking. You can't be quite forsaken while I live; and at the worst you're a grown woman and can defend yourself, as far as any creature can, in a world like this. But if you and I had happened to die,—there are so many chances in life; and the child had lived, and fallen into uncle's hands . . . I wonder, did he never think of that?”

She drew his head down against her cheek.

“Dear, that is morbid and unjust; it's not like you, you are always so just. There was

never much danger for Johnny ; surely either you or I could always have managed to save him from that, if only with a little chloroform. And anyway the fates have been merciful ; whatever they may do to us, they have at least spared the child. Jack, you have no right to be bitter against him, the child has suffered no wrong. He has hurt no one but me, and I have not complained."

"Don't be afraid," he answered, sighing. "It will make no difference ; nothing will ever make any difference. He's her son and he has a right to me. I must just bear it."

A knock at the street-door roused him.

"That sounds like a telegram. From Edinburgh, perhaps ; I was to have shown some sections to-night. For me, Susan ? No, there's no answer."

There was a little hush after he shut the door.

"Is it from Edinburgh ?" Molly asked, looking round. Jack was standing by the table, the telegram still in his hand. As he turned his head to answer, the look on his face cut her to the heart. Something faint and

bitter, scarcely a smile, flickered for an instant round the bearded mouth.

“No,” he said. “Something wrong with one of the duchesses, I suppose.”

He handed her the telegram. It was dated from Paris.

“A dreadful misfortune has happened. Come to me.—Theo.”

She laid the paper down in silence and went back to her place by the dead child.

Jack passed a hand across his eyes. A dim reflection of his childish misery flitted before him, and vanished; a half-forgotten image of a bird flying away from an open cage. He went back to the cot.

“Molly, how much money have we in the house?”

“Three sovereigns and a little silver.”

He looked at his watch.

“I’d better take the gold and write you a cheque to go on with. Where’s the carbolic, dear? Ask Susan to call a hansom while I get disinfected; I’ve only just time to catch

the boat-train ; it starts at nine from Charing Cross."

He stood a moment silent, looking down ; then stooped, and drew the sheet over Johnny's head.

THE END

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